



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 5, 2012

Issue 28a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 28th Legislature

First Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)	Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)	Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)
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Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)	Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)
Cusanelli, Hon. Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)	Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)	Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)	Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC), Deputy Government House Leader	Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
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Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)	Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
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Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)	Scott, Hon. Donald, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (PC)
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Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)	Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W), Official Opposition Whip
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Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)	Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Hughes, Hon. Ken, Calgary-West (PC)	Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)	Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)	Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC), Government Whip
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL), Liberal Opposition Whip	
Kennedy-Glans, Donna, Calgary-Varsity (PC)	

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms	Liz Sim, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Greg Weadick	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Bhardwaj	Quadri
Blakeman	Quest
Donovan	Rogers
Dorward	Sandhu
Eggen	Sherman
Fenske	Smith
Goudreau	Starke
Hehr	Strankman
Jansen	Towle
Luan	Young
McDonald	Vacant
Olesen	

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Quest
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Anderson
Casey
Dorward
Eggen
Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Allen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Luan

Blakeman
Dorward
Fenske
Johnson, L.
McDonald
Notley
Saskiw
Wilson
Young

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Pastoor
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DeLong	Luan
Fox	McAllister
Fraser	Notley
Fritz	Pedersen
Jablonski	Sarich
Jansen	Saskiw
Jeneroux	Swann
Johnson, L.	Wilson
Kang	Young
Kubinec	Vacant
Lemke	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Brown
DeLong
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Rogers
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Calahasen
Dorward
Forsyth
Goudreau
Jablonski
Mason
Quest
Sherman
Smith

Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Ms L. Johnson

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Bhardwaj	Olesen
Brown	Pastoor
DeLong	Rowe
Fox	Sarich
Fritz	Starke
Goudreau	Strankman
Jeneroux	Swann
Kennedy-Glans	Webber
Luan	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Amery	McDonald
Bhardwaj	Notley
Casey	Pedersen
Hehr	Sandhu
Jansen	Saskiw
Jeneroux	Towle
Johnson, L.	Xiao
Kennedy-Glans	Young
Kubinec	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson
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Amery	Hehr
Anglin	Kang
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Donovan	Starke
Fenske	Stier
Fraser	Webber
Fritz	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rowe

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Anglin	Johnson, L.
Barnes	Kubinec
Bilous	Lemke
Blakeman	Leskiw
Brown	Sandhu
Calahasen	Stier
Cao	Webber
Casey	Xiao
Fenske	Young
Fraser	Vacant
Hale	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. May the spirit of Christmas and the festive season permeate our hearts, comfort our minds, and make us ever mindful of the expectations entrusted to us by the citizens we are so privileged to serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Werner Wnendt, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany. The ambassador is accompanied by Mr. Reuscher, honorary consul of the Federal Republic of Germany at Edmonton. I had the pleasure of hosting the ambassador at a luncheon earlier today, and I'm confident that this visit represents a growing relationship between Alberta and Germany as we identify new opportunities for moving forward. The ambassador and honorary consul are seated in your gallery. I would ask that our guests now rise, and I would like to invite all of the members in the House to send our best wishes along with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Canada's heroes, members from the Jasper Place Legion in Edmonton-Meadowlark, good honest men and women who put themselves into harm's way without a second thought so that we may enjoy our freedoms today. In your gallery are Doreen Morgan, president; Basil McKay, past president; Ron Evans, chairman; Marian Youngs; Bill Cormier; Shirley Lauman; Pat Cerir; Sharon Gullberg, past first vice-president; Dennis Gullberg; and Ken Young, a veteran of the Second World War.

I met these great folks on Remembrance Day, and every Remembrance Day is so that we may remember their fallen comrades. I would like all Albertans to remember that we live in the best province in the best country in the world because of the sacrifices of them and their comrades. [applause] It's so important for us to remember to keep our end of the sacred covenant to care for them and their families each and every day, for all members of the armed forces, past, present, and future. May God bless our superheroes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like all members of the Assembly to rise and give them a warm welcome to the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For several years the Legislative Assembly has supported the regional Historica Fair held every spring, providing an opportunity for students from schools in the surrounding area to present projects celebrating

Canada's heritage. In 2007 the Legislative Assembly Office initiated an award to recognize Historica Fair participants who demonstrate outstanding achievement in celebrating an aspect of Canadian parliamentary democracy, governance, or political history with a specific focus on Alberta.

It's now my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's award winner. Nicholas Pacholok was a grade 6 student at Vital Grandin Catholic elementary school in St. Albert last spring when he created an excellent presentation on democracy from Athens to Canada, a very interesting topic indeed. Mr. Speaker, Nicholas is joined today by his parents, Barbara and Ken, all of whom are seated in your gallery. I would now ask that all members join me in celebrating as they stand and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 63 grade 6 students from l'école Meridian Heights school in my outstanding riding of Stony Plain. These bright and energetic young people are here for a tour of the Legislature and to see how our democracy works. They are escorted today by teachers Mr. Art Muz, Mr. Marcel Turcotte, Mrs. Natacha Schubert; parent helper Donna Crowe; student teacher Chelsea Strachan; and their bus driver, Mrs. Sally Tuininga. Also included in this group is our Sergeant-at-Arms' niece, Dominique Hodgson. I know they were thrilled to have a picture taken with you earlier today, Mr. Speaker, and I was able to have a picture taken with them myself this afternoon. The motto of l'école Meridian Heights school is Be the Best You Can Be. These young people certainly exemplify that idea. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you two classes who are here from the stunningly beautiful historic Academy at King Edward, which resides in the centre of my constituency. I have here 23 visitors from grade 9, who are accompanied by their teachers and assistants: Ms Ashley Mourgelas, Mr. Chris Giasson, and Mrs. Debbie Sugiyama. Then there are also 34 visitors from the grade 6 class at Academy at King Edward, who are accompanied by their teachers: Peter Beairsto, Mona Luth, Maureen Munsterman, and Colleen Cooper. I can say that I had the wonderful privilege to visit with the grade 6 class at the Academy at King Edward through reading week, and we had some wonderful conversations about public health care in Alberta. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly a group of several constituents who are here for a variety of reasons. I'd like to introduce them to you, then ask them to stand at the end. First is Dee Ann Benard. She is the executive director of the Alberta Rural Development Network, an industry-leading network of 21 public postsecondary institutions working with rural communities to enhance rural research and learning. I had the opportunity to do a member's statement on one of their projects earlier this week.

Also, Milt Miller and Margo Mohr are here from Providence Grain Solutions, an industry leader in agricultural development.

Milt, who is the president and CEO, brings with him new-found knowledge of international agricultural practices from a recent trade mission to China with the government of Alberta. With him is his executive assistant, Margo. As many of us know, our EAs are essential to our success.

Finally, we have a great family here from Fort Saskatchewan, who attended a recent open house of mine to show their support and appreciation of the government's newly passed Education Act and asked if they could attend the session.

I would ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly: Ms Dee Ann Benard, Milt Miller, Margo Mohr, Paul Nawrocki, Dominika Nawrocki, and Ian Novakowski.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Adele Andriashek. She's here today representing the Tomorrow Project, which is a Canada-wide longitudinal study that's helping scientists discover the causes of cancer and other debilitating diseases. The project is seeking the participation of 50,000 Albertans, and they still need to sign up 20,000 people to accomplish this goal by March. To that end, they've distributed blue and green wristbands to all of the members. I would encourage all of the members and their staff to join the project and to encourage their constituents to sign up for the project, too, through various advertisements. Adele is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I'd ask her to rise and please accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two visionary Albertans from my diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. They are Charlene Preston and Patrick Turnbull. Charlene is my constituency assistant in Hanna, and Patrick is my constituency assistant in Drumheller. I'd like them both to receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a constituent, community volunteer, and a friend, namely Mr. Dave McNeill. Dave is the incoming president of the Association of Alberta Registry Agents as well as the president of the Hastings Lake community league, a very active community group in my constituency. Dave is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two courageous seniors who head up the Alberta association of Seniors Helping Seniors. They're here to remind this government of the unfulfilled promise of Premier Klein to restore seniors' benefits cut in the '90s. Could Mr. Mike Marlowe and John Munnikhuis please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Helen Nolan. I first met Helen in 1998, when I was a beat constable along 124th Street. She was the executive director for the 124th Street and area business revitalization zone, a position she held for 13 years. Passionate for small business, community, and safety, she's also an accomplished singer of notable demand. After retiring, she accepted a contract with the city of Edmonton to form a BRZ in the area of 91st Street and 82nd Avenue, called the French Quarter, which extends from Mill Creek to Bonnie Doon. [some applause] The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is certainly very appreciative of this contract.

This BRZ was passed by city council on November 17. I'll ask Helen to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Please proceed with your second introduction, Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is another special guest, Alex Zeidler, a student from L.Y. Cairns high school. Alex is currently on a work placement in my office and those of my caucus colleagues, and he resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. If I could ask Alex to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature His Worship Martin Shields, the mayor of Brooks. Mr. Shields is definitely no stranger to this Legislature. As an active public servant he sits on many boards and associations throughout this province. Just to name a few he currently sits on: the Alberta libraries board, the Bow River Basin Council, he is vice-chair for the Shortgrass regional libraries board, the board of directors for our federal Conservative constituency association, director for cities under 500,000 on the AUMA. There are many more, but I don't think we have enough time to list them all. I also want to add that he did recently beat Lanny McDonald in a mustache contest. This hard-working Albertan also just recently received the Diamond Jubilee medal. I would ask His Worship to rise, as he has done, and receive the warm traditional greeting.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Government Relationship with Physicians

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week all members of this Assembly received a very powerful letter from a local doctor working here in Edmonton. As time does not permit me to read it in its entirety, I would like to take this opportunity to read part of that letter.

I am a recent graduate of the University of Alberta, where I completed my medical degree and then followed it with specialist training. . . This entitles me the privilege of a career that most people cannot fathom, or even begin to understand. As an anesthesiologist, I am able to provide care to the sickest of patients at life-threatening moments, and I consider it a privilege to carry this title with my Alberta colleagues . . .

We are here in the middle of the night when the woman in labor starts bleeding uncontrollably. . .

We are here when your elderly father needs emergency brain surgery for a ruptured aneurysm . . .

We are here when your precious son needs to have pins put in his broken arm . . .

We are here to care for our patients. We are here to save lives.

The recent actions of the Alberta government against their province's [doctors] is unfathomable . . . I have the obligation to express my indignation that the Minister of Health and . . . government is refusing to negotiate an agreement with the AMA.

She concludes her letter by saying that Alberta should boast the fact that most medical residents stay within Alberta following their training to provide service in our province, but this will likely change if the Alberta government does not listen to its doctors.

A very powerful message, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's doctors deserve to be taken seriously and treated with respect by this government. I hope the Minister of Health has taken the time to read this letter and has taken the message to heart. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Long-term and Continuing Care for Seniors

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Associate Minister of Seniors recently referred to seniors as "our most precious commodity." Now, the government would say that his words were simply a slip of the tongue, but the reality is that under this government seniors in Alberta are often treated like commodities. That reality endangers not only seniors but our entire health care system. Alberta has 1,366 seniors waiting for care; 459 of those seniors are waiting in acute or subacute care spaces.

It shouldn't be news to this government that they'll never address hospital occupancy rates or wait times without addressing our long-term care shortage. The government knows that by 2020 Alberta will need almost 50,000 long-term care spaces. That's a frightening number considering that Alberta currently has 1,450 long-term spaces, the exact same number that the province had in 1992, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors who are waiting for care would be right to doubt the government's commitment to provide that for them, but even when Alberta seniors get into long-term care, they face problems with understaffing and with quality of care. Over the years the NDP has tabled thousands of forms from Steelworkers, AUPE, and CUPE locals that illustrate just how much pressure is put on staff to do more than they possibly can. These forms show the real problem behind seniors not being bathed and cared for regularly. They tell the story behind dementia patients wandering away without supervision, patients getting scalded by bath water, meals delayed and missed, and the fact that seniors are actually sometimes lucky to get one bath a week. That story, Mr. Speaker, is chronic short-staffing and a failure by this government to put staffing and care standards in place.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's seniors deserve more than misleading promises to add beds, and they deserve more than empty promises to look into it when gross failures in care are brought to our attention. What they deserve is the quality of care they need when they need it and to be able to receive that care with the dignity and the respect that they have earned. This government simply must do better for Alberta's seniors.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we start the clock, I've received some notes from opposition members and also from certain government members with respect to the 35-second rule, so let us be ever mindful that the chair will do his best, obviously,

to ensure that questions do not exceed the 35-second time frame, nor any answers. As you will note from reviewing *Hansard*, I have on occasion had to stand and ask people to sit and curtail their questions or their answers because they have violated the clock.

I would ask you to also be mindful that on occasion the Speaker can receive three, four, six, 10 notes all at once. Yesterday, in particular, I think we set a record from all sides of the House, all members. I received over 30 notes yesterday on various issues. So I'll try and do a better job of policing the clock, and I'll ask you to do a better job of policing yourselves.

With that, let us start the clock and begin question period with Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition leader.

1:50

Physician Services Agreement

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier bemoans the opposition's questions about accountability and prefers questions about policy, so today I'm going to ask about her policy of renegeing on deals and breaking promises like the deal she had with the AMA before the election. During the election the Premier announced 140 family care clinics would be built at a cost of at least \$3 million to \$5 million each, and after the election the Premier scrapped the agreement in principle with the doctors to do it. Is it any wonder that the AMA doesn't trust this Premier, this minister, or this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely true that prior to the election there was an agreement between the government of Alberta and the AMA with respect to ongoing negotiations. After that election, one of the parties, not the government of Alberta, decided to renege on that agreement. In those circumstances, the government of Alberta continued to bargain in good faith, keeping the money on the table to make sure that health care was going to be delivered to Albertans.

The other thing is that the work we are doing with respect to family care clinics is continuing. We're working with the College of Family Physicians. It is going well, and we will deliver.

Ms Smith: I will table the doctors' ad, where it talks about the government rescinding their support for the agreement, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the Minister of Health doesn't know what the cost will be and given that the doctors estimate \$700 million will come directly from the budget for physician services to pay for it, will the Premier confirm just how much physician services will be cut to pay for her family care clinics?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the wonderful thing about the resources that we have right now in our Department of Health is that we have the ability, with commitments that have been made by this government, to support practitioners, to support licensed practical nurses, and to make sure that we are delivering those services. It is very clear to the people that are working in this system through primary care networks and family care clinics that it's going to be entirely possible for us to fund these. We are committed to funding these. Again, we see numbers thrown around with no support, and I don't think that the hon. member has any reason to believe them either.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that there is no explanation about how these new clinics will work, that there's no evidence that they are any better than primary care networks, just a heck of a lot

more costly, \$62 per patient versus \$300 per patient, and given that the current troubles with the AMA negotiations are a direct result of this poorly conceived scheme, can the Premier explain why she thinks that cutting doctors out of delivering primary care is such a good idea?

Ms Redford: Doctors across this province are delivering excellent primary care. Mr. Speaker, over the last seven months what we've heard from Albertans and from doctors is that primary care networks and family care clinics are going to deliver and are delivering through pilot projects even better health care. We made a commitment in the last election to ensure that there is better access for Albertans to health care, and that is our job, to represent the interests of Albertans. It's the AMA's job to represent the interests of doctors and, apparently, the Leader of the Opposition's.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, your second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: I make no apologies for standing up for doctors, Premier.

Omnibus Question

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the questions about the government's policy of renegeing on deals and breaking promises, on October 30 I asked about meetings that the Finance minister had with the Katz Group when they were told no on the request for arena financing and casino licences. I asked for details on when and where those meetings took place, who attended, who arranged the meetings, and how the no decisions were made and communicated. Now, the minister said: "I'd be pleased to get you the dates of the meetings. It's not a secret." It's been more than a month since he made that promise. When is he going to keep it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to review other areas of *Hansard*, I actually did say where and when I met at the two meetings that we had. I also indicated that the lobbyist that was on file at the time was a gentleman named Peter Elzinga, who is known to many people in this House. So I'm not exactly sure what other details the hon. member might be looking for.

Ms Smith: I'll put it in writing, Mr. Speaker.

I have another question. Given the previous answer perhaps we could also ask the Premier if she would now be willing to keep her promise of a full public inquiry and extend the queue-jumping inquiry to include past queue-jumping, also include the excessive emergency room wait times, and to include the bullying and intimidation of our front-line health care providers?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, from what I've been reading in the newspaper, there is a public inquiry going on with respect to exactly what we committed to do. I'm very pleased that it's taking place. I don't know what the results of it will be, but I'll tell you what we did do. We kept our promise.

Ms Smith: Well, I'll try on a third one, Mr. Speaker. Given the government's promise of more openness and transparency, we might also ask if the government would now be willing to release all of the expenses for all of the executives for all of the health regions going back to 2005?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess this is déjà vu week, and we're going to review questions that have been asked and answered incessantly over the course of this session. The opposition has made it very well known to this House that they are very adept at using the processes that are available to them through the

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to access this information. Today there are a number of expenses, additional expenses, that have been posted on websites that are also available for their review.

Mr. Speaker, we are interested in being the government in 2012. If the opposition wants to talk about 2005 and other years, that's entirely up to them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Tobacco Recovery Lawsuit

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier insists that hand-picking a firm led by her transition team leader and long-time confidant for a \$10 billion government lawsuit was the best choice for Alberta, but her own words state, "No . . . consortium stood out above the others." Why does this government refuse to release the terms of the contract when the firm already gave its blessings to make the contract public? Just release it.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, same question yesterday, same answer today. We have received advice from that very firm that the member mentions about how this could endanger our case and our chances to recover money that is owed to Albertans from big tobacco. This member is a lawyer himself. He should appreciate that contingency fee agreements are very rarely released. At this time it is not appropriate. I am going to take my seat.

Mr. Saskiw: We put Albertans first, not lawyers.

Premier, will you, in order to ensure that Alberta taxpayers aren't being ripped off for potentially hundreds of millions of dollars, confirm to this House that the contingency percentage offered by JSS in their proposal was, in fact, the lowest of all the proposals looked at by the Ministry of Justice?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely pleased to stand up in this House and say that I can't answer that question because I didn't make the decision. [interjections]

Mr. Saskiw: Wow. Sorry. I'm just trying to catch my breath here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. We have a long-standing tradition of allowing whoever has the floor to in fact enjoy it. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is clearly enjoying his moment. Let's not take away from that.

Please proceed.

Mr. Saskiw: I am, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Given the obvious conflict why didn't the Premier direct her deputy minister to decide which proposal was in the best interests of and the best deal for Albertans, or is it this government's normal practice to politically direct the public service to make government deals based on political cronyism instead of the public interest? How many other deals are like this?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've seen this opposition in this House yesterday, today, and all of last week continue to come up with baseless allegations that aren't about governing Alberta. [interjections] I'll tell you what we've done and what we've delivered for Albertans. We've delivered elections financing legislation. We've delivered whistle-blower legislation. We've delivered an Education Act. We have completely transformed the regulatory process to ensure that we have environmental sustainability and competitiveness. That is what Albertans voted for in April, and we delivered. [interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's observe our decorum, please.

The leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

2:00

Expense Reporting

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the election the Premier tabled a fudge-it budget, and the day after we were at a \$3 billion deficit. Albertans want to know where their money is going. According to the report of selected payments last year MLA pay and perks cost taxpayers \$14 million. The Premier ordered an independent review, but the PC-dominated Members' Services Committee has failed to establish a new independent process in reviewing the pay. Instead, it cherry-picked what it liked and didn't like from Mr. Justice Major's report. To the Premier: how do you justify your government's failure to establish a truly independent process?

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. member, be careful with words like "fudge-it budget." I heard a government member a week or so ago use the same thing, and I'm going to admonish the government side as well. It's the context within which you use it that sometimes leads to some disorder in the House, and I would really like to avoid that disorder. Let's just be careful of some of these little slips that sometimes happen inadvertently, sometimes deliberately.

Expense Reporting (continued)

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, maybe I can answer that question by quoting something. "We do recognize that the fully taxable amount of \$134,000 does constitute a significant pay cut for most MLAs. If you look at the report from last year, there were some government MLAs making . . . \$150,000 to \$160,000," and I recognize that it caused a hardship, that it was a pay cut. I'm quoting the leader of the Wildrose Official Opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I had asked for the Premier to rise.

Given that in his recent report the Auditor General expressed repeated concerns about questionable expense claims and use of corporate credit cards, specifically regarding postsecondary institutions like ACAD, SAIT, and the University of Alberta, can the real Premier, you, Madam Premier, please tell us if anyone in your government knows exactly how widespread the abuse of taxpayer money really is in these institutions?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that we're actually repeating so many questions from question period earlier this session because it makes the answers so much clearer, and it gives us an opportunity to reiterate real information for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we have an independent Chief Electoral Officer, whose job, rightly, is to ensure that if there are challenges or difficulties or concerns that people have, they assess the information and deal with them. I understand that the Chief Electoral Officer has done that in every case that has been brought to their attention. I'm pleased that our election finance legislation will confirm and enhance that, and I look forward to any of those results. If the hon. member has any questions, he should refer them to the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has done a good thing by posting her expenses and they clearly show that she has good taste in first-class flights and fine dining and fine dining – these are the same tastes that many senior executives at AHS had as well, the few that were looked into. My question to the Premier: given that only 1 of 380 agencies, boards, and commissions has disclosed the information and 50 per cent of taxpayer dollars is spent by these agencies, boards, and commissions, how much more money is wasted that could go to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the Premier said, the more these same questions are asked, the better opportunity we have to make the answers even clearer.

Mr. Speaker, the only question that is of relevance here is whether expenses that were paid at any point in time were paid in accordance with the policies and procedures that were in effect at that time. At this time this government has the most aggressive and the most open and transparent expense policies of any jurisdiction in the country. All agencies, boards, and commissions under the jurisdiction of my ministry have been asked and have indicated that they will act in accordance with those policies.

The Speaker: Just to clarify, hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, any member of Executive Council is empowered by our rules to answer a question or not.

The hon. leader of the New Democratic opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thanks. Mostly not, Mr. Speaker.

Tobacco Recovery Lawsuit

Mr. Mason: I'm quoting from the Conflicts of Interest Act, section 3. "A Member breaches this Act if the Member uses the Member's office or powers to influence or to seek to influence a decision to be made by or on behalf of the Crown to further a private interest." To the Premier. The words there are "influence or to seek to influence," not "sign the final contract." Did you or did you not influence or seek to influence the decision to hire the International Tobacco Recovery Lawyers?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that the Official Opposition is sharing their questions with the NDP. I think that's fantastic. I think yesterday it was with the Liberal Party. But again it's an opportunity to clarify that that is simply not the case. Just because an hon. member makes the allegation, as I always tell my 10-year-old, doesn't make it true.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier is happy to share her nonresponsiveness with Albertans, can the Premier explain why she stands by her decision to sue big tobacco, but she won't stand by her signature on documents from the Justice ministry that prove that she sought to influence the decision to hire the International Tobacco Recovery Lawyers?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, if the member won't accept the answer from the Premier, maybe he'll accept it from me, but the answer will be very much the same. The fact is that the Premier will stand by her promise to sue big tobacco because that is the right thing for Albertans and our health care system, unlike some other parties across the way. Our Premier will always stand by her word, and Albertans can trust that what she says is dependable.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I'll thank the Premier for sharing her Deputy Premier with the House.

Given that the Premier's signature is on the documents and given that evidence from her own department officials proves her involvement, my question to the Premier is: how can Albertans trust her when she continues to deny the facts?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, every day since I got elected in this House in 2008, I've stood by my word.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-North West.

Long-term and Continuing Care for Seniors

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fall session is quickly coming to an end, and this province has some very serious issues facing it. Seniors, their loved ones, their caregivers are concerned about the direction this government is going regarding closure of long-term care nursing beds in this province. Albertans are expressing concern that this government is not listening, that this government is pushing forward a continuing care model that is not meeting the needs of our most vulnerable seniors. As I always tell my 10-year-old, seniors come first. This is causing turmoil not only for those in care facilities but also for the hundreds of seniors waiting in long-term care. To the Minister of Health: can you assure Albertans in this province that you will no longer close any more long-term care nursing beds?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what I can assure Albertans is that this government is keeping its word. We are adding 1,000 continuing care spaces per year to this province, by far the most aggressive infrastructure campaign for continuing care that I'm aware of in Canada. We're on track to meet our goal of 5,300 spaces. I can tell you that all of the new beds that we are adding are built to a long-term care standard for the specific purpose of allowing our seniors to age in place, remain with their spouses, and as much as possible stay in their home communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Health would not even answer the written question put forward to him by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek as to how many long-term care beds we have in this province, how can this minister stand up and assure Albertans that he is not closing long-term care beds in nursing or continuing care centres for even the next six months?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question would be very simple. This government is in the business of funding the care needs of individuals regardless of where they live, and that includes everything from home care right through to supportive living and long-term care. As we have said time and time again, the philosophy of this government differs distinctly from the opposition in that we believe in supporting Albertans to age in place, to stay in couples whenever possible, and to live as close as possible to their home community. The business that we're engaged in is the quality of life for the seniors of this province, not the bricks and mortar discussion that the opposition continually wants to engage in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Health talks a lot about this care for seniors and the need for long-

term care nursing beds but just closed the Little Bow continuing care centre – there are many more on the list; we've asked for that list – will the Minister of Infrastructure protect Albertans and provide a list of any closures, necessary upgrades, or new long-term care nursing and continuing care facilities assessed by your department today?

2:10

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've consulted with my colleagues and Albertans across the province, and I can tell this hon. member that Infrastructure has no plans to close any long-term care beds in this province.

Expense Reporting by Cabinet Ministers

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, some folks in my constituency want to see the government's expense claims, and they can't find them, and if they can't find them, I'm guessing a lot of Albertans can't find them. To the Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: what do I tell them?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to be here today. The government of Alberta has proactively disclosed expense claims for all members of cabinet, continuing to deliver on the Premier's commitment to an open and transparent government. Our proactive disclosure of our ministerial expenses goes back to the election. Following the release of the Premier's expenses earlier this fall, that proves that our commitment to accountability starts at the top.

Ms Jansen: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how can my constituents in Calgary-North West expect to see these documents easily given that you've deposited them in a library in Edmonton? Are we being transparent or merely opaque?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, we are being transparent. The expense claims that we deposited in the Legislature Library can be found on the library's online catalogue for all Albertans to see. Going forward, we have the most aggressive expense disclosure policy in Canada. Every Albertan is going to be able to see the expenses of every minister and senior government official. It's all going to be online starting in mid-December. That's transparency. We're delivering it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us allow people to have the floor. I've asked earlier, and I'm going to have to get out my list pad again, I see, and perhaps penalize some of you for not maintaining the proper decorum in the House, to be polite.

Hon. member, you have the final supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Finally, to the Minister of Service Alberta, Mr. Speaker, who likes to talk about Alberta leadership on this issue: how can your ministry make this claim?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that in the interest of transparency it'd be very nice if you had a very transparent version of that list pad as well so we could all see and all members across this province could see which members in this House cause ruckus unnecessarily. Let us respect this institution, this fine institution of democracy, this fine institution, and this fine government that has made expense disclosure policies that lead this country. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, you can see why I'm doing my best to enforce these rules that we're all asked to live by because if I don't, you will have more disruptions, and then we won't get through the list at all.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Mr. McAllister: I really enjoyed the last performance, Mr. Speaker, I must say.

Collective Bargaining with Teachers

Mr. McAllister: Contract talks, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we know are not going that well with Albertan teachers, and the issue isn't about money, it's about workload. Teachers are being snowed under right now in a blizzard of paperwork. Does the Minister of Education recognize that this is a serious problem for today's teachers, and is he willing to help reduce the mountain of paperwork and let teachers spend time doing what they do best, and that is teaching our children?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Yes, we need to make sure that we have the world's best in front of our children. We need to make sure that they're doing the high-value tasks, and they're focusing those skills on the things that are going to help our kids succeed. We absolutely want to have some discussions and dialogue, and we've got some strategies to move forward on addressing some of the workload issues with teacher, but one area where we do differ is that we don't think those workload discussions should be wrapped up in putting hard caps on the amount of minutes a teacher, who's a professional, a noble professional, should be able to work in the classroom per day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I appreciate the honest answer from the minister.

Given that this PC government had no problem, though, working out a five-year contract with teachers during an election, given that the Premier had no problem finding \$100 million for the teaching industry during a leadership campaign, does the minister recognize that Albertans are starting to wonder if the only time the government does what's right in education is when there are votes to be had?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think we can all take exception to that. Obviously, we're doing what's right in education today. The Premier made some great promises over the last year and has delivered on them. She promised to reinstate \$107 million in the education system; she did that right away. She promised to give school boards predictable and stable funding so they could manage their business and make good, solid decisions; she did that. She promised to bring the Education Act forward and get that delivered; she's done that. Now what we're trying to do is get another long-term deal province-wide with teachers to put the students at the centre of this thing and make sure that it's about the students. We're not going to rush into a deal unless it's got the students at the centre of the deal.

Mr. McAllister: We acknowledge and applaud the Education Act, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the minister: even though this is not about money, is it hard to negotiate with teachers and work out a deal when they

look at you and your government and recognize that you've just voted yourselves an 8 per cent raise?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I think maybe the hon. member should read his leader's e-mail that was just written here a few minutes ago. It seems that they're not quite on the same page.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to negotiating with the teachers, no, it's not easy. There are a lot of complicated issues here. It's very simplistic to think that one quick solution is going to get us a deal for four or five years across the province, dealing with 35,000 people in over 2,000 different schools, different communities, dealing with different classrooms and different kids. We're trying to recognize some of those nuances. We want to move to a system that has more and more differentiated learning, that recognizes diversity in the classroom, and that can give teachers the supports they need for those unique kids in those classrooms.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A business owner in my constituency told me that the volatility of electricity in Alberta makes it extremely difficult for their business operation. In a letter to me he said that the maximum capacity of installed generation in Alberta is posted at 14,400 megawatts. The real availability of maximum capacity is closer to 13,000 megawatts, and the provincial system is hovering at about 9,000 to 10,000 megawatts. However, the pool price is a 40 per cent increase. My question is to the minister. What is the reason for these massive price spikes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member. You know, you don't have to take the facts from me. We could actually go to the Manitoba Hydro survey earlier this year of Canadian electricity bills. If you look across the country, Halifax was an average of 118 bucks, Toronto was \$108, Saskatoon was \$98, and here at home, in Edmonton, it was \$91. This province has a system that works and delivers cost-effective electricity to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the fact that deregulated power generation has increased greatly the amount of electricity in Alberta without taxpayer dollars being involved, what options do businesses have so they are not held hostage by the volatility of electricity prices?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, those of us who have been in business understand that having a nonvolatile input like electricity to a business is an important aspect. There are several ways to do that. One of them is to actually contract with a provider for electricity. In Alberta there are more than 40 different choices on the market that Albertans can access, that small businesspeople can access, and that individual Albertans can access as well. Many also have gone to self-generating projects. That's all about customer choice. We think that's a really important aspect for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before continuing with my question, I just want to say that I'll table the letter of my constituent later for the hon. minister to reply to.

To the same minister: how can this government ensure that we are meeting the power requirements in Alberta with the rapid growth of our province?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's actually a very important and relevant question for all of us. It turns out that since 1998 almost 7,000 megawatts of new electricity generation has been created in this province. I say that that has come about completely with private-sector investment and not one dollar – not one dollar – of debt on the public books, the way you find it in virtually every other province in this country. The private sector does it here in Alberta, and they will continue to do so. It's between \$10 billion and \$15 billion of investment by the private sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:20 Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since Alberta Health Services took over the emergency medical services, there has been a steady loss of Edmonton EMS staff to other centres and services due to unacceptable high levels of stress, red alerts, and poor response times. Rural ambulances – rural ambulances – are still frequently called in to assist Edmonton and Calgary EMS. To the minister: what has the minister done over the last six months to fix the broken EMS system and the demoralized EMS workforce?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I did was take the opportunity to go on a ride-along with some EMS staff in Edmonton to observe first-hand some of the challenges that they are facing in their work on a day-to-day basis. I would certainly agree with the hon. member that emergency departments are busy. They are still experiencing high volumes, including ambulances that arrive. But the good news is, of course, that many improvements have been put in place to try to alleviate this problem. One of the most important is the ability now for EMS staff to be able to hand off care of a patient while they wait for an emergency room to another EMS crew in order to allow the EMS crew to get back out on the road. As the hon. member knows, there is a larger review under way on this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The challenges continue. Will you today tell Alberta Health Services to stop hiding EMS response times and post them online, which they haven't been doing for a month?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's quite a serious allegation, and I'm not sure exactly what the hon. member is referring to, but I will take the opportunity to look into it. I can certainly tell the House that both Edmonton and Calgary wait times for EMS departments by hospital are now available online on the Alberta Health Services website.

As the hon. member knows, we commissioned a large-scale review of EMS in the province by the Health Quality Council of Alberta. That report is expected to be delivered to me shortly, and I'll be sharing the results and the recommendations with all members of the House.

Dr. Swann: I wasn't talking about ER wait times. I was talking about EMS response times.

What do you say to the Ardrossan individual who last week was choking and waited 30 minutes for an Edmonton ambulance because the Ardrossan ambulance was here in Edmonton helping them cope?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the hon. member would expect me to answer that specific question about a specific case. If he has information that he would like to share with me and ask me to look into that and get back to him, I'd be very happy to do so.

What I can tell you is that one of the issues I've asked the Health Quality Council to look at is the impact of the borderless ambulance system, which is a system that provides in many cases for faster response times in some areas of the provinces but also on occasion draws ambulances away from their home area to assist in areas with higher call volumes. We have had reports of that having in some cases negative impact on local communities. We're looking into that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bridge Repair and Construction

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties says that funding for bridge replacement needs to be increased to at least \$70 million per year. The Department of Transportation's own capital plan says that it needs \$90 million per year, but this PC government is only budgeting \$25 million per year, less than one-third of what's required. Will the Minister of Transportation tell us which bridges the PC government plans on closing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that there are no bridges that we're planning on closing. I would also say that the recent Auditor's report does point to an upcoming bubble in the requirement for money to fix bridges. We're aware of that. I've taken that up with my staff, and in the upcoming years as that need progresses and increases, we will have to include that in our budgeting. Right now we are quite confident that the budgeting we have in place is adequate to do the job, and we will continue to do that job.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that the Department of Transportation's own capital plan for 2012-17 says that its strategy to manage the shortfall includes closing bridges across Alberta, can the minister explain how it's possible to accept bridge closures that will literally put roadblocks in the way of Albertans?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose that depends on how you look at it. I know that there are several bridges under repair right now. As they get old, sometimes you close one and replace it with another. The network, I can assure you and I can assure Albertans, is in good shape. The audit itself actually said on page 5 that there's no evidence of unsafe bridges. This government continues to monitor the situation and look after the bridges as required. I think the Auditor's report made it quite clear, actually, as well that we're doing a good job of that very thing.

Mr. Bilous: That could be debated.

Given that numerous systemic problems were identified by the Auditor General, including a no-meet bridge and maintenance committee, lapsed inspector certifications, and failure to collect information on the quality of inspections, and given that this government has no information on 68 per cent of bridges in Alberta, does this minister honestly think that blind faith is strong enough to hold up bridges in Alberta?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor also was aware and said in his report that we have very good systems. He pointed out some administrative shortfalls, all of which have been solved. So Albertans can have complete confidence in the bridges that we have, whether they're on top of them or underneath them, any place that they are because they're in good shape, and Albertans know this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat will be completely affected by the South Saskatchewan regional plan. My constituents are concerned about how the implementation of this plan will affect them, especially given that this government has a long track record of ignoring legitimate concerns of landowners. Government officials are in Cypress-Medicine Hat this week and claim to be asking Albertans for input. To the minister of sustainable resource development: why should Albertans think that this is anything more than just another PR exercise?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague, who is at the United Nations climate change conference in Doha . . .

An Hon. Member: There is one?

Mr. Hughes: There is one. Actually, they believe that the science is settled, and so does the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, the South Saskatchewan regional plan is a legitimate initiative of this government to ensure that we protect property rights, that we protect water rights, that we protect the environment in southern Alberta, and that we're all proud of what we leave to our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the lower Athabasca regional plan proposed a number of conservation areas and given that this resulted in the cancellation of 19 oil sands leases, can the minister assure my constituents that no property rights, leases, or private lands will be affected or expropriated for the creation of conservation areas in the South Saskatchewan regional plan?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, that's an easy question. As we would all know, in the lower Athabasca regional plan area there were needs to establish in an essentially largely uninhabited area long-term plans for the long-term needs of the community. Southern Alberta, as you will know, has been settled for, you know, a good century and more. There are well-established practices. There are some wonderful parks throughout southern Alberta. The answer to your question is that there will be none of that kind of stuff going on.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the government was there nine months ago and didn't listen to the people, given that ranchers in southern Alberta have held some of the Crown leases for over a century, given that ranchers are, without question, the best stewards of the

land, and given that grazing is very beneficial for the land and for species at risk, will the minister personally guarantee that these long-term Crown leaseholders will not have their property rights violated?

Mr. Hughes: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm the perfect person to answer that question. I'm the grandson of ranchers, and I'm the son of ranchers. I can tell you that I actually understand this issue. You know, people have been out there raising concerns, unfairly disturbing people from their livelihoods, telling them all kinds of things. None of that stuff is going to go on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Little Bow.

2:30 Heartland Electricity Transmission Project

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The heartland transmission line connects with the Ellerslie substation and will run next to many homes and businesses in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. My constituents have a number of questions about the project and feel like they have been left out of the process. My first question to the Minister of Energy is this: why are the transmission poles being put up in my riding when the heartland project is before the courts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the heartland project, as we all know, was something that was approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission. That was the trigger to commence construction on the project. The province, of course, deemed this critical infrastructure in 2009. The Alberta Electric System Operator identified it as an important project in 2005. We all know that the Industrial Heartland in this province is actually driving growth in the province, and it needs reliable energy.

Mr. Sandhu: My second question is to the same minister. Do my constituents have any recourse to stop this project?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Utilities Commission held extensive hearings and consultations on the routing of the project. In fact, that included reaching out with more than 47,000 information packages and approximately 1,200 personal consultations with stakeholders. They conducted a public hearing for all affected landowners. I know that the hon. member has worked hard on behalf of his constituents to ensure that they also had a chance to have their input into the process. There were 27 registered individuals who participated and 163 registered witnesses.

Mr. Sandhu: My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Why were monopoles approved to be used near Sherwood Park and not in my riding in north Edmonton?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether there are monopoles or other styles of poles installed along the route is entirely a technical decision that is made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. They've taken into account all of the concerns raised by people through those many months and years of consultations with residents who might be affected or who are adjacent to the line. As a result, the Alberta Utilities Commission has the authority and the responsibility, and the last thing any of us would want is to have political interference in that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Postpartum Depression Counselling Services

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is botching health care as evidenced by the doctors' negotiations mess, the family care clinic mess. But I want to raise a different issue today, one that is critical for the people that are touched by it. Moms who received postpartum depressing counselling in the MD of Foothills and surrounding areas have been told this service will end before the end of the year. To the Minister of Health: why would they try to save money by targeting the vulnerable mothers and babies?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for contacting my office late this morning and advising me that he would be asking this question. Thank you. My staff did look into this with the Calgary zone of Alberta Health Services, where we were unable to obtain any confirmation that any program cut is planned. If the hon. member has more detailed information about the situation that he'd care to share with me, I'd be very happy to look into it further.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for that because that's what we're here to do, to get some answers. This is a critical service that affects mothers, spouses, and children. Why would you try to target these things?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly not trying to target this. As the hon. member said, postpartum depression is a serious issue. It is, in fact, far more prevalent than I ever realized until I had the opportunity to have some discussions about the prevalence of different types of depression in our province. So I support the hon. member in raising the issue, both with respect to a specific community and more broadly. As I said, if he'd be prepared to furnish me with some details, I'll certainly look into it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government targeted Down syndrome services in Edmonton recently, and they had to reinstate it. Will you please commit to reinstating this much-needed service as well?

Mr. Horne: Well, in this, Mr. Speaker, you know, I must object to the hon. member's language, first of all, to suggest that the government is targeting a particular group in society, let alone a very vulnerable group. This is not reasonable and not accurate and not an appropriate way to frame a question. In that particular instance I believe I was asked in the House a couple of times about the situation, and that service has not been affected. The nurse that provides those case management services to those families is still in place, and the service continues. If this hon. member wants me to look into the situation in his community, he needs to provide me with some details.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty years ago the United Nations declared December 3 annually as International Day of Persons with Disabilities to focus on issues that affect people with disabilities world-wide. My questions, therefore, are for the associate minister of Human Services, who is responsible

for the disability file. Cases of persons with developmental disabilities are increasing in Alberta. How is the minister preparing for this dramatic challenge?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for raising the issue and marking the international day and also the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who gave a statement on that earlier this week. We are not only managing an increasing population but an increase in complexity of cases, and it's a great concern to us. The first step is integrating all of Human Services under one ministry, which has really allowed us to work on integration and breaking down silos. Under the great direction of the Minister of Human Services in our social policy framework we're building a new framework for disability services that will provide better integration, focus on outcomes measured by results-based budgeting.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Minister, for these initiatives. Unfortunately, for parents and families of disabled children there is a very heavy and demanding administrative burden as their child turns 18. For instance, one department may request . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's just get on to the question, please.

Ms L. Johnson: Okay. With the situation of formal trusteeship and guardianship can the minister simplify the requirements for parents?

Mr. Oberle: Well, the simple answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. We can do a lot to streamline, and that's another advantage of integrating all of Human Services under one ministry. We can do a lot to streamline services there, and I'll mention specifically the issue of guardianship and trusteeship and streamlining. We can work towards that, but we will always work to protect the rights of the individual.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are also considering a family-managed care plan. Does that have a huge administrative burden as well, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the option of family-managed care under persons with developmental disabilities is always available, where a family member, a close friend, or an individual themselves can specify that they want to enter into a family-managed care contract. It's not for everyone. It provides a management or an administrative burden, but it does allow for flexibility and control over the situation. Anybody interested in family-managed care can start by working with their local persons with developmental disabilities board or, just for information, visit our departmental website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Budget Review Challenge Panels

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this government does not like to answer questions on accountability, let's try one on policy and see where we go. The Finance minister has bragged about his results-based budgeting program and has told us that

wonderful benefits will flow from it. Part of the process is the challenge panels, which are supposed to challenge the government's spending plans. Can the minister explain to us how he came up with the public members of these challenge panels and what steps were taken to prevent conflicts of interest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It actually is a good question. What we did was that we used the agencies, boards, and commissions governance outlines that we have for all of our boards and commissions. We looked for people that had skill sets that would be attributed to asking the right questions of the civil servants. This is not about trying to find cuts in budgets. This is about trying to make sure that we're doing the right thing for the right objectives, and these challenge panels are there to simply do that. They're not there to change policy. They're not there to cut budgets. They're there to help our civil servants do the best job they possibly can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a quick glance at the list suggests that at least seven individuals on the six challenge panels are mentioned in the lobbyists registry, does the Finance minister really think he will get impartial advice from folks who have registered to lobby the government on a variety of interests, including one individual who has lobbied on behalf of his own interests?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the role of the challenge panel is not to lobby their interests. The role of the challenge panel is to ask piercing questions of the civil servants. The role of the challenge panel is to ensure that the plans that we're putting forward are going to achieve the objectives that we're setting out. The role of the challenge panel is then to review the progress of those plans as they progress through the period of next spring and through the rest of the year. The role of the challenge panel is then to ensure that the results that we're getting out of that are actually achieving the objectives that taxpayers want, not the challenge panels and not the ministers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that Martin Kennedy, the VP of government relations for Capital Power, is on the municipalities challenge panel. Now, given that the city of Edmonton is the largest shareholder in Capital Power, isn't there a conflict having their VP getting insider details on the preparation of Municipal Affairs' and regional planning budgets?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the role of the challenge panels is not to provide advice. The role of the challenge panels is not to take policy decisions or even to lobby on policy decisions. The role of the challenge panels is to challenge the questions. There is no conflict of interest on any of the members.

The Speaker: Just before we move on to Members' Statements, the continuation of which will start with Calgary-South East, I wonder if we could just take a moment to salute for the first time in this Assembly a birthday of a significant member of the Assembly who's never had the honour of having her birthday during a sitting day in her 23 or 24 years of being here. Today, Lesser Slave Lake, it is your lucky day for your milestone.

Congratulations. Hon. members, we seldom if ever reveal ages, but suffice it to say that she is the rock of ages.

Hon. members, 20 seconds from now we will continue with private members' statements. [Members sang *Happy Birthday*]

Hon. members, that was 20 seconds well used. If any member of your caucus has a milestone and you wish to alert the Speaker to that milestone, I would be happy to pay a tribute to you as well.

Let us move on with Calgary-South East.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Achievements

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked, we lived in the best place in the world. The last time I checked, Alberta's real GDP was forecasted to expand by 3.7 per cent this year, nearly double the growth forecast for Canada and the United States.

The last time I checked, an election was held and Albertans voted for a government that represented their values and their vision for the future. The members elected to this House are honest, hard-working, and credible people in their communities. The last time I checked, we were elected to pave a way for the future of this province based on respect for all Albertans and a love of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked, Albertans expected us to debate policy in this House and pass legislation that is meaningful. The last time I checked, politics in Alberta was about policies and had never been about personalities. The last time I checked, Albertans expected us to debate policy in this House, not tabloid or Twitter rumours.

The last time I checked, Albertans were expecting us to keep this province prosperous and competitive in world markets, to support the communities who need our help, to build an economy that supports businesses large and small, to partner with municipalities and communities where people don't just make a living but make a life, to build a province that people are proud to call home.

Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked, Albertans elected members of this House to represent them and respect them. The last time I checked, Albertans wanted us to listen to them and have their MLA deal with issues that affect them and their families. The last time I checked, Albertans wanted us to hear those issues and have them addressed in this House, not fabricated scandals over and over again.

The last time I checked, this government was passing legislation to address the issues that concern Albertans. The last time I checked, Mr. Speaker, the Premier was striving to keep focus on those issues. The last time I checked, that's what this House was intended to do. The last time I checked, a person was presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, not in a headline or a hash tag.

The last time I checked, Mr. Speaker, this government had a job to do. We will govern with respect, integrity, and purpose, and I'm here with my colleagues to get that job done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Providence Grain Solutions

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is proud of our petrochemical industries, but in addition we are just as proud of our agricultural sector. Providence Grain Solutions is one example of just how vibrant and dynamic

this industry is not only in my constituency but across Alberta and Saskatchewan. Providence Grain Solutions is celebrating their 10th anniversary this year, and I am so excited that they can be here today as we highlight the true community partnership that they provide.

The value added to our community by Providence reaches far beyond my constituency and into many of my colleagues'. There are elevators in Strathcona county, Waskatenau, Viking, a joint venture in Mundare, and holdings in Clyde and Crossfield. I am personally impressed that Providence Grain Solutions is primarily farmer owned and operated as this is so often representative of our hard-working agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are well known for our ability to nurture small businesses and to support local initiatives. In the last decade Providence has grown from the little grain company that could in Fort Saskatchewan to a national company with the capacity to fill 125 CP or CN railcars at any one time at their terminal in Alberta's Industrial Heartland.

Recently Providence became part of a Canada-wide group of firms who will handle product for farmers who choose to continue to sell their grain to the Canadian Wheat Board. As we move forward exploring alternative energy measures, Providence Grain continues to evolve as they handle the procurement of soft white spring or ethanol wheat to Growing Power Hairy Hill, Canada's first integrated biorefinery.

Mr. Speaker, I am so proud that Providence Grain is a member of my constituency and that they demonstrate the truly Albertan value that no matter how big they become, they will always remember their roots.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

International Volunteer Day

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. December 5 is recognized around the world as International Volunteer Day. This is a global celebration that should have meaning for every Albertan. There is not a citizen in this province who has not in some way been a beneficiary of the amazing contributions of everyday heroes in our communities. If there's a community hall in your town, if you've ever stood and cheered the local kids to victory, if you've ever enjoyed the fun of a local festival, then you have seen first-hand a local volunteer.

Mr. Speaker, the quality of life that we enjoy in our great province would not be possible were it not for the dedication and generosity of our volunteers. These individuals and the organizations they support deliver programs and services valued at over \$9 billion annually to our youth, families, and the most vulnerable citizens in our communities.

Many leave the comfort and security of their homes to travel to areas around the world, lending their time and skill to help those in need. With humility and devotion to duty, they bring honour to our province and to our nation. The government of Alberta is proud to return that honour. Earlier today my colleague the hon. Minister of Culture, Heather Klimchuk, presented the stars of Alberta volunteer awards to six incredible Albertans. Stars of Alberta is one of the ways that the Alberta government is recognizing and paying tribute to not just those who have been selected for awards but to those who day to day in their lives make a difference to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all the members of this House and all Albertans to take the time today and every day to remember and to

thank our incredible Alberta volunteers, each one an everyday hero.

The Speaker: Just a polite reminder, which I think the hon. member reminded herself of, that it's inappropriate and not allowed to raise the actual names of members of this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually rise proudly wearing my In 4 Tomorrow wristband in support of that good cause.

2:50 EQUUS Rural Electrification Association Ltd.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, rural electrification associations are an integral part of keeping the lights on in rural Alberta. Last week Albertans from as far north as Barrhead all the way down to the U.S. border welcomed the newest REA with the merger of the Central Alberta Rural Electrification Association and that of the South Alta REA. Members of both associations voted in favour of the merger at meetings held in Innisfail and Lethbridge.

The result is that as of January 1, 2013, the EQUUS Rural Electrification Association will be the largest member-owned utility in Canada. Reports indicate that meetings were well attended by members, and the decision to merge the two REAs received an enthusiastic majority of 91 per cent voting in favour of the merger. As a result of the merger, EQUUS REA will have an Alberta service area of 28 counties, accounting for a broad swath of the province. The merger will help maintain the association's focus on providing quality service to rural areas.

I welcome the news of the formation of the new EQUUS REA and congratulate the members on their economic vision in planning for the future of enhancing electricity delivery for rural Albertans. The merger will make EQUUS REA stronger and more competitive as well as provide rural Albertans with customer choice.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the Routine, might we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of very special Albertans seated in the members' gallery who have been enjoying question period. They are the stars of Alberta. Today I had the great honour of accompanying our hon. Premier in a ceremony presenting them with awards to recognize their dedicated service as volunteers. I'd ask each of them to rise as I say their names: first, our youth winners, Jocelyn Davis from Calgary and Rimbey's own Samantha Sperber; next are George Heidt from Edmonton and Bev Toews from Olds, our adult category winners; lastly, Wendy Birdsey and Norm Brownell of Calgary, the winners of our seniors category. Please give these outstanding volunteers the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Bill 208 Seniors' Advocate Act

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 208, the Seniors' Advocate Act.

This act would create an arm's-length seniors' advocate, reporting directly to the Legislature, not to government. It would be modelled after the Child and Youth Advocate. It would protect seniors, advocate for seniors, and give an independent voice to some of the most vulnerable people in our province. Unfortunately, I realize this act will not make it into debate. I'm disappointed in that, but I hope at some future time to bring it forward again.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of a letter from my constituents to table.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from a local doctor, which I referenced in my member's statement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. The first one is a news release from the Alberta government dated December 5, 2012. It's Redford Government Leading Canada on Expense Disclosure. I think it's a good thing.

Number two is from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, talking about posting expenses of Alberta ministers online, dated December 5, 2012. Five copies.

I have five copies of page 167 of the report of the Auditor General from October 2012 pertaining to "systems over costs for internal working sessions and hosting guests" for the University of Alberta.

I have five copies of a newspaper article by Kelly Cryderman, dated December 5, 2012: Alberta MLAs' Pay, Perks Cost \$14 Million Last Year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Bhullar, Minister of Service Alberta, the Alberta vital statistics annual review 2010.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Human Services, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors radiation health administrative organization annual report for the year ended June 30, 2012, with attached financial statements dated June 30, 2012; the Alberta Dental Association and College 2011 radiation health and safety program annual report from January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011, with attached financial statements dated

December 31, 2011; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2011 annual report with attached independent auditor's report dated December 7, 2011; the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report 2011-2012; the University of Calgary radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2012, with attached financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2012.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Olson, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, a chart listing Canada and U.S. food recalls from October 2012 to December 2012, sourced from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 7

Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 7, the Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've had a rather robust debate the last week or so, spent about 12 hours on this. I'll try not to rehash it all, but there are a few points that I just wanted to make. I believe that the proposed amendments will ensure strong governance, greater transparency of provincial elections and campaign financing, and overall improve Alberta's electoral process. As I've indicated before, we've relied very heavily on the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations here, an independent, nonpartisan body that reports directly to this Legislature. He provided 101 recommendations; we have accepted 90 of them.

The first one I just wanted to mention is that there has not been a lot of debate, Mr. Speaker, about the new enumeration policy around income tax based enumeration. No longer will you have people knocking on your door, at a cost to the taxpayer, collecting information, which can be inaccurate. We are going to be moving to a system whereby people can simply check off on their income tax. What I would envision happening is that on the provincial income tax we'd have three questions. Number 1, are you a Canadian citizen? Obviously, you have to be a Canadian citizen to vote. Number 2, have you resided in Alberta for at least six months? That is the qualification under this act as it remains. The third is: do you wish to be on the provincial list of electors? I have spoken with the Privacy Commissioner about this very issue, and no particular issues were raised.

Mr. Speaker, essentially, this process of income tax based enumeration is going to result in a better voters list for less money. B.C. is the only other province that has embarked on such a policy, and from their website they expect a \$25 million saving. The federal government has been doing it for a number of years, and the federal government estimates an 84 per cent compliance rate of people who want to be on the list. Of course, this is going to be voluntary.

I wanted to thank the members opposite. There appears to be some bipartisan support for this change, which I think will be very positive towards our democracy in Alberta.

I wanted to touch on some other amendments. Amendments to the Election Act will ensure continuous improvement to the electoral office by allowing political parties to have input through the development of the electoral process through discussion with the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer will also provide his recommendations to the Legislative Assembly in reports laid before our Assembly.

We will increase transparency by requiring the disclosure of name and contact information of the sponsor of election advertising. Mr. Speaker, in one of his documents the Chief Electoral Officer indicated that he had received 800 to 900 complaints about autodiallers, which are referred to as demon dialers or robocalls, throughout the last election. We are not in any way restricting the usage of these items, but at the same time, we're just putting some parameters around it so that people will have to put their name on it, who the sponsor is, where the phone number is. Hopefully, that will encourage some political parties, candidates, constituency associations, third-party groups to use this important tool in a more responsible fashion.

3:00

I wanted to mention as well that the amendments to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act will increase accountability by applying to leadership contests. All donations over \$250 will have to be reported. It will also lower the threshold of these contributions, which used to be \$375 – again, it's now down to \$250 – and, of course, Mr. Speaker, require quarterly disclosure, which will encourage openness and transparency but will also advise the public not only just on an annual basis but every three months as to any donations over \$250.

Mr. Speaker, amendments to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act will also help increase compliance. The chief financial officers of political parties will be required to make reasonable efforts to ensure prospective contributors are aware of the provisions of this act. Contributors will be responsible for ensuring that they are not making illegal contributions, and I will always believe the primary onus has to be on the donor because they know their individual circumstances best. Parties, constituency associations, and candidates will be subject to sanction if they solicit or accept a contribution that they know or ought to know is illegal. It is a dual-pronged approach but with the primary emphasis on the donor.

Regarding enforcement under both the Election Act and the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer may impose an administrative penalty, issue a letter of reprimand, or refer the matter to prosecution, the latter of which typically happens in the most severe case. With respect to illegal contributions the Chief Electoral Officer will have the authority to impose sanctions upon the donor and the recipient. I do want to also highlight that the ceiling for administrative penalties is being increased from \$1,000 to \$10,000. There can also be more severe penalties imposed, but again that must be referred to a prosecutor.

We also had some disagreements with the Chief Electoral Officer. We maintained that the current legislation allows him to disclose any issues where there's been an administrative penalty, where there's been a referral to a prosecutor, or when there has been a letter of reprimand. Regardless, Mr. Speaker, it's time to get past that. We are fixing the issue. We're moving back three years, which is the limitation period under section 52 of the act. The Chief Electoral Officer will have the authority to go and disclose any and all information where there has been a letter of reprimand, an administrative penalty, or a referral to a prosecutor over the last three years. Of course, that does apply during the last

election. The Chief Electoral Officer will be authorized to disclose this information with respect to offences that occurred within three years prior to these amendments coming into force.

These amendments, again, will come into force upon royal assent, not proclamation. The proposed amendments of Bill 7 will promote fairness and transparency in our electoral process.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank a few people throughout this entire process. This has been a long process, and I hope that we are coming to the end of a long road here. I wanted to thank, first of all, our legislative drafter, Peter Pagano, and his staff, who've worked tirelessly on this entire matter. I'd like to thank the hon. Minister of Human Services and Government House Leader, who's been very helpful, and, of course, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who will be speaking later in third reading as much of this bill deals with the Local Authorities Election Act.

Thank you very much for the time to address you in third reading, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've just been asked to clarify the process. Very briefly I'll do that. There is no 29(2)(a) after this particular speech that has just been given, and there's no 29(2)(a) after the next speech.

The next speech is from the Leader of the Official Opposition, and she has up to 90 minutes. The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you now have everyone terrified that I'm actually going to use the full 90 minutes.

The Speaker: It's all yours.

Ms Smith: I will aim to be brief because I have already spoken at length on this.

I do just want to start by providing some context because this will be the last opportunity I have to speak in the Legislature this session before we return again in the spring. I know that there have been some sanctimonious members' statements directed our way, I'm quite sure, about the way in which this House has conducted its business. What I will say is that for the most part I believe that the business of the Chamber has moved on in quite a collegial way. If you look through the 10 bills that have passed in the Legislature, I would say that the members of the Official Opposition, the majority anyway because we do have free votes in our caucus, have been supportive of the bulk of the government's agenda in this fall session.

For instance, there was majority support for Bill 1. I think there was unanimous support, in fact. We also were supportive of the Education Act, though we did attempt to make a number of amendments to it. Both of those, Bill 1 and Bill 3, were the only bills where the government accepted any opposition amendments.

Bill 5, the New Home Buyer Protection Act, enjoyed widespread support, including in the opposition ranks. Bill 6, the changes to the OHS and safety codes also enjoyed support. The changes to Bill 50, which was renumbered Bill 8: although we had significant change we wanted to see to that, generally we were supportive of the direction of returning an independent needs assessment back to the Alberta Utilities Commission. Bill 9, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2012, to make some housekeeping changes: supportive of that. Bill 10, the changes that were made to the Employment Pension Plans Act: supportive of that.

I think there has been a great deal of work that has been done, and in many cases it has been with the support of the opposition. We certainly have been open to being supportive of those things

that we could agree on. Where we've seen difficulties and where we've seen differences of opinion, of course, have been on three major bills: Bill 2, which is the Responsible Energy Development Act; Bill 4, which is the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act; and, now Bill 7, which is the Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012.

I have to say that if we're talking about respect, integrity, and purpose, I can tell you that it certainly didn't show much respect, integrity, or purpose for the members opposite to vote down virtually every single amendment that was proposed not only by this opposition party but by the third-party opposition and the fourth-party opposition as well. I think that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview – unfortunately, he isn't here – was keeping a better tally of this than I was, but I believe there were 119 amendments that were proposed to these various bills. As I've already mentioned, the government only chose to support two.

Now, I know from the conversations that we have in our caucus – and you've seen that we have had free votes on a number of issues. We've had our members voting differently, and I suspect you will see that there will be members voting differently on this bill as well. I find it very, very hard to believe that 61 Progressive Conservative MLAs looked at 117 amendments and couldn't find a single one that was worth supporting. I find it very hard to believe that this is rising to the level of respect, integrity, and purpose that the hon. member opposite was just lecturing us all about. In fact, I've heard very many sidebar conversations have taken place over the last couple of weeks about how some of these amendments were quite good, but they couldn't be supported because they were being proposed by the opposition.

There is a term in psychology called "projection," and projection is where you actually accuse your opponents of exhibiting behaviour which you yourself are actually demonstrating. I think that what we're seeing, for all of the whining and complaining to the media that the members opposite do, is a little bit of projection because I have to say that I have never seen such blatantly partisan behaviour as I've seen of the members opposite for this entire process.

I do want to congratulate the members from the other opposition parties. I think that we've enjoyed having a number of late nights debating a variety of amendments. We've appreciated the support that you've lent to our amendments. I hope that you've appreciated some of the support that we've given to your amendments. I only wish that I could congratulate the members opposite for being equally open minded.

With that in mind, moving to the issue at hand, Bill 7, I had initially risen to speak generally in favour of Bill 7. As I've already mentioned, we do have a split in our caucus. There are some members who do support the legislation because of the fact that there are many amendments – many amendments – that I think are worth supporting. When you have 90 out of 101 recommendations that have been put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer accepted by the government, that's a very positive thing, so this is a bill where it isn't all bad. I think that much is very clear.

Some of our members are inclined to support some of the positive aspects of it like student voting, like the fact that there's disclosure of the leadership campaign donations and the fact that there's greater disclosure around the issues of surveys and polls. I think everybody was driven crazy, quite frankly, by all of the dialing and robocalling that took place during the last election. So I think that there are some good reasons why you would see some members support this bill.

3:10

I personally, though, am not going to support this bill. I think it's quite clear to me that this bill fails to reach the standard of accountability and transparency that the Premier keeps promising that she's going to deliver on. This bill does not raise the bar in the way that I think the Premier had given the expectation that she would when she became leader of her party and then subsequently Premier of the province. Let me go through the significant problems that we have with this bill that could have been corrected and that the government, unfortunately, chose not to, which is the reason I'll be opposing it.

First of all, let's remember how we got to this point in the first place. We had a series of high-profile scandals involving huge corporate political donations and tax dollars being funnelled to political parties, which has shaken the public confidence in our democratic process. Albertans want to know that our democratic elections are fair, that political parties can't be bought by special interests, and that the sole stakeholder in our elections is and always will be the individual voter.

In the spring the Justice minister began this whole process in the four days of question period that we had by seemingly refuting that we needed to have a change in legislation at all. There seemed to be some confusion on that side about the restrictions that they had placed on the Chief Electoral Officer to speak openly and candidly about the results of his investigation. There was confusion about whether he was permitted to release the results of his investigations when he found wrongdoing, and he has found wrongdoing.

In a July press release his office indicated that he had commenced 81 separate investigations – we know that there are many others that could be initiated – of which in 37 he found wrongdoing, in another 14 he found wrongdoing and only indicated a warning or an administrative penalty, and in the remaining 30 he found no wrongdoing. The fact that he was not permitted to release these results was the very reason why the Justice minister was ultimately pressed to bring forward the legislation that he did.

Now, in combination with that, we knew that there was going to be a change to the four-year election cycle for municipalities. I think it's unfortunate that he smooshed these two bills together because I think that there are many hon. members who actually are more in favour of some of the changes made to the municipal elections law than they are of the paltry attempts to fix the electoral financing law, and you may have found that there would have been more support if this had been split into two different bills.

Let me go back to some of the reasons why we are also here. I do find it interesting as well that the Justice minister finally did end up accepting the majority of the recommendations proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer when it was the previous Chief Electoral Officer who did not have his contract renewed after having put forward recommendations. It was quite clear that his recommendations ran afoul of what the government wanted at the time. I suppose better late than never. But it is unfortunate that there were some significant proposals that were put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer that were left on the table.

It is also unfortunate that we will never know the 19 files that the former Chief Electoral Officer had put forward to prosecute, which the then Justice minister, now Premier, chose not to act on. It's unfortunate that we will never know what those cases involved because we think that it would have gone a long way towards actually putting teeth into this legislation if you actually

had a Justice minister and a government that were committed to prosecuting when they found wrongdoing.

We're glad, in any case, that it's closing some of the loopholes. However, it certainly doesn't go far enough in closing all of the loopholes, and as it is written, Bill 7 does actually very, very little to improve accountability and transparency in our democratic processes.

I do want to go through the amendments that the members opposite rejected of ours, because I do know that in sidebar conversations at least some of the members were supportive of them, and just remind them that it's their own party's inability to allow free votes – again, another broken election promise from the current Premier and leader of their party – and the fact that they have whip votes on that side that has prevented them from being able to support some of these, I think, quite reasonable amendments. I'll just run through them again because, hopefully, at some future point, when these amendments come back, there might be another opportunity to address them.

In the first case, we wanted to see an amendment that would have rejected the demand for quarterly financial reporting from the constituency associations. This was not a recommendation that came from the Chief Electoral Officer. It's a bit strange that it's in there, especially since we know that this is going to create a huge amount of additional paperwork burden on all of our constituency associations.

We know that they're volunteers. We know that during election periods a lot of the activity of our constituency associations does end up curtailing – this is going to create an additional enormous burden of paperwork without really getting at the issue of some of the transparency. We already have limitations at the local constituency level. It's not the local constituencies that we're worried about receiving a \$430,000 cheque from a single donor. That's actually happening at the political party level. The fact that the government has chosen to put this in and would not listen to some of the arguments about the excessive paperwork burden I thought was unfortunate.

We also know that the government and the Justice minister made it quite clear that they think it's the donor's responsibility and that the burden should be on the donor to share the responsibility or most of the blame for illegal donations. We tend to take the other view. It's the political party that should know what the election rules are. Most donors don't wake up in the morning and say: gee, I'm going to cut a cheque for \$430,000, and I need to find a way to get around the rules. That is something that is solicited from a political party, and it's the political party who should bear the burden of the blame and the burden of the penalty when that occurs. The government quite clearly wants to continue to keep the burden on the donors. We think that the burden should have been placed on the political party, and of course they rejected that.

We also believe that we needed to close the Katz loophole or the Katz lobster boil loophole, as I think the hon. House leader saw the debate go. We knew that it was some of the smaller pooled contributions that the hon. House leader on the opposite side was concerned about, so we were willing to propose a sub-amendment to try to address some of the concerns that he had. It's still unfortunate that the government did not see fit to make the changes, that we know Albertans are asking for, to close this loophole that allows huge donors to be able to cut a single cheque and then write multiple tax receipts to friends, associates, and family members, skirting around what the law clearly is designed to do.

There would have been a very simple way for them to close that loophole. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills

proposed it, and of course it was voted down by the members opposite. So it didn't do anything, I think, to restore public confidence that we have a system now that can be trusted going into the next election.

We also wanted to make taking action on violations mandatory for the CEO, not optional. This is something that even the Justice minister talked about when he introduced his legislation. I was over at the press conference, and he was quite clear that the Chief Electoral Officer must release the results of the investigations. But, heck, when you went and looked into the actual legislation, it didn't say "must"; it said "may." I don't know why it is that the Justice minister would tell the media one thing out in the public, and then when he was challenged in here to actually make the legal change in the wording to give weight to what he had said, he rejected the amendment out of hand. I think that this was an error.

What people need to know is that when wrongdoing is found, when an investigation takes place, when there are fines or administrative penalties, the Chief Electoral Officer must release that to the public so that we will know who has done wrong, so that there is that element of public shaming. Part of the reason why all of these illegal donations have been able to go on and on and on, year after year after year, where some say, "well, it was just our common practice," is because no one has ever suffered a penalty for anything. There has been no public disclosure when wrongdoing has been found. There's been no disclosure of fines. Having this mandatory is an essential component of making sure that people follow the rules. Again, I think that this is another missed opportunity on the part of the government, and it will go not one step further towards restoring public confidence in the system.

We also wanted to see publicizing the failure to pay the penalties on time. We all recall what happened to Toronto Mayor Rob Ford in the last couple of weeks. One of the things that the integrity commissioner requires is that you have to pay the fine and you have to show proof that you've paid the fine. One of the ways in which this issue kept returning and became a matter of public concern was that there wasn't evidence that the penalties had been paid and that they had paid on time. Publicizing that failure to do so is just one other aspect of the public scrutiny that should be put on these kinds of illegal donations in order to make sure that they stop. It would have been a very simple administrative issue, very simply setting up a website. It wouldn't have required a whole bunch of additional forms or paperwork or enforcement officers, yet once again it was rejected, unfortunately, by the members opposite.

3:20

Another amendment: extending the statute of limitations for punishing and publicizing illegal donations. We wanted to make this retroactive seven years. We know that wrongdoing has gone back further than that. We know that the government had attempted to clarify what the rules were back in 2004. No one seemed to listen. And why would they? There was no serious effort being made on the part of the governing party or the Chief Electoral Officer to root out the wrongdoing, stop it, and publicize those who had done wrong.

We know that there is a lot that needs to be cleaned up. We would have argued that since most people are required to keep their tax returns going back seven years – and this really is a tax filing issue, so people should be able to keep their tax forms related to donations to political parties – it would not have been a hardship for anyone to make this a bill that would be retroactive seven years, not the three years that has been proposed.

We think that seven years was rejected for, quite frankly, political reasons. We know that there's a family member close to

the Premier who would get caught up in the issue of illegal donations. We think that this is a period of time that was set deliberately to prevent the prosecution and investigation and disclosure of wrongdoing in that circumstance. I think that's unfortunate. These laws that we make should be made for the benefit of the public, not for the benefit of any particular private interest, not to benefit or shield any particular person from prosecution. I fear that's what's taken place in this case.

Another amendment that we proposed. We worked with the mayor of Calgary, Mayor Nenshi, to try to correct an apparent error. This should have been a very straightforward amendment. It looked as though only candidates who are elected would forfeit their surpluses to charity. What Mayor Nenshi had proposed is: let's just make the wording change so that it's quite clear that if you're a losing candidate, you also have to donate your surplus to charity. Once again, what seemed to be a very straightforward, simple, logical amendment was rejected by the members opposite probably for no other reason than that it was proposed by the opposition party rather than proposed by a government member.

Making a CEO report of wrongdoing mandatory, not optional, is absolutely essential if we're going to prevent actions of wrongdoing in the future. You have to be able to have all of the files reported in a mandatory way.

We also wanted to see a lowering of contribution limits. We were pleased, actually, that the NDP put forward a contribution limit. We had proposed that we would see an amendment that would lower donation limits from \$30,000 during an election to \$10,000 and from \$15,000 in a nonelection year down to \$5,000. But the NDP did propose a \$3,000 max that would take place during an election year or nonelection year. We also liked the approach that they took of suggesting that you would have a \$3,000 max as well for the constituency associations because we know that a lot of the election expenses these days take place at the local level as well. We thought that that was a reasonable amendment, so we were prepared to support that, but once again the governing party voted that down. We think that what we need to see is some limitation on the upper limit for what the contributions are during an election campaign so you can once again restore in the public the confidence that there isn't any relationship between the dollars contributed to a political party and any influence that might take place on political decisions after the fact.

I think, unfortunately, the reason why we're even having this discussion is because we have seen instances where huge, huge corporate donations or individual donations have been made, with the appearance that they intended to influence government decisions because there have been significant decisions before the government at the time that those decisions have been made. There would have been a very simple way for them to address that, and that would have been by limiting the contribution limit.

One other way that they could have limited it was by banning corporate donations. Now, we have already mentioned, of course, that we as an opposition party raised a lot of money in the last election. We also would have been impacted by a ban on corporate donations, but we felt so strongly and received feedback from our members at a recent AGM that this is something that they want to see. They want to see election financing returned to individual voters. They want to remove the influence of corporate and union donations from the apparent effect that it has on political decision-making. Unfortunately, the government once again voted that down.

We would have liked to have seen them propose an amendment that would have allowed for the same ban to apply to trade unions. We did the best we could putting forward an amendment that

would have ended corporate donations. Unfortunately, once again, that amendment failed.

We also would have liked to have seen, finally, the raising of the maximum penalties for those who have done wrong, for parties and for individuals. The government has proposed \$1,000 to \$10,000. We would have liked to have seen that go a little bit higher, to \$25,000. We know that the government is increasing fines for administrative penalties across a whole range of different types of violations. We think that these kinds of violations are very, very serious because it draws into doubt the integrity of our democratic process when we have seen repeatedly, year after year after year, our Election Act violated. We think that having a serious penalty levied not only against those who are the donors but also those who are the recipients of these donations would have gone a long way towards ensuring that we could restore some integrity to the elections financing legislation and also the way our elections are conducted.

There are a few things that we wish we had seen in this legislation. We know that the Premier, when she was running for leader of the Progressive Conservatives, promised a fixed-election date. Of course, she didn't deliver on that. She doesn't deliver on many of her promises, Mr. Speaker. She delivered a fixed-election window. But I noticed, once again, the Chief Electoral Officer said all of the benefits that would be derived from having a fixed election date – I'm not quite sure how the government members can be so double-minded about this. They kind of accept the idea of a fixed-election date for municipalities, but they reject the idea of a fixed-election date for provincial political parties. I think the idea is that they want to be able to continue to manipulate the choice of the election date to be able to choose the election date when it's an advantage to the governing party as opposed to having one where it's fair to all.

We also would have liked to have seen an amendment if we were going to go through and change the elections law – I may as well say it. We would have put forward an amendment for recall because I can tell you that with some of the things that we've seen in the last few months, I can imagine that there are a few MLAs who would be facing a recall petition today. So we'll have to save that one until after the next election.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would have liked to have been able to support this legislation. I know that my caucus was looking forward to being able to have a reasonable debate, putting forward a reasonable argument for reasonable amendments, and they thought that the members opposite would give some reasonable consideration to them. They did not, and as a result, instead of passing a bill that I think this whole Chamber could be proud of, we're passing a piece of flawed legislation that falls well short of what it is that the Premier promised in her election campaign and well short of what the Justice minister, I think, could have accomplished had he been able to see his way through to supporting some of our amendments.

Let me just summarize the main things that we believe this legislation has not done. We thought we needed to address the issue of corporate and union donations and ban them. Not done. We needed to make sure that there were rules in place to have more strict contribution limits and also that they could not be skirted around. That was not done. We wanted to make sure that illegal activity was reported not just for the last three years but going back, the same period that we're required to maintain our tax records, seven years. That was not done. We also wanted to know that the results of all of these investigations would be revealed. Not done. We wanted confirmation that any fines that were levied would be paid back. That was not done. We wanted

confirmation that any illegal donations would also be paid back. That was not done.

We put forward a package of potential amendments for this bill, and quite frankly the government just simply ignored them. Many of these proposed recommendations had been endorsed and proposed by the Chief Electoral Officer, so there was an extra level of validation to what we were proposing, but once again the government ignored them. I think the government ignores its own democratic deficit at its own peril.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be opposing this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've received notes from several individuals from virtually all parties regarding the speaking list, so let me just clarify what I have based on the order in which it was received and bearing in mind the standard practice of alternating between government members and the other opposition party or parties as the case may be.

We've heard from the Minister of Justice, who moved third reading. We've heard the response from the Official Opposition. I have now a spot for a member from the governing party, which will be Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Airdrie, followed by another member from the governing party. At that point, which will be the fifth spot, in other words, the rotation that I have in mind is a member from the government side, so to speak, followed by NDP, followed by Liberal, followed by Wildrose, and it'll start over. Now, that doesn't mean that everybody will use that rotation, but that's what I have.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Airdrie, and Standing Order 29(2)(a) will be available starting with this next speaker.

3:30

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I heard words like "blatant partisanship" and, I suppose you could say, "playing politics." What I'd like to talk about is a couple of grand flip-flops as they pertain to this bill, particularly regarding corporate donations, an area that I spent a lot of time thinking about and pondering because it is a philosophical area. It's an area where we've got to make sure that we get it right. I came to the conclusion, as I stated in the debate last night, that I don't see a problem with corporate donations, particularly as that pertains to the small businessperson.

Regarding those corporate donations I've done a little bit of research and found that while working at an esteemed Calgary newspaper, the MLA for Highwood, the Leader of the Official Opposition, commented on the imminent removal of corporate donations from the federal scene. At that time, Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 was the imminent removal of the corporate donations; therefore, corporate donations on the federal scene would not be there anymore. I quote from that article of May 2003: Bill C-24 is unconstitutional, and he, Mr. Prentice, wants the Tory party to challenge it in court to prevent it from becoming . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. member, just please have a seat.

Hon. members of the Wildrose who are shouting out some interjections, please be reminded that the purpose of third reading is not to go through the bill stage by stage, step by step, clause by clause. However, in deference to your leader I did allow her to go through some of the amendments because I thought that they were important for her to enunciate, and I allowed her that full freedom. I did not have to, but I allowed it. Now I would ask you to please allow some consideration for the member who's speaking now.

Hon. member, I will remind you, however, that relevance under 459 of *Beauchesne's* is important and that we don't need any more points of order.

Let's keep this at the same level that we kept it when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was speaking. I would ask for all of your concurrence in that regard, please. This is an important bill. We recognize that. It's at a very critical stage in this House. Let's just preserve the decorum and hear what members have to say and give them the floor to say it.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed relevant to Bill 7 at third reading.

Debate Continued

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The context is that I want to stand on the record as being in favour of particularly small business being able to make corporate donations. Of course, we understand that on the federal scene that was removed.

If I can continue: the Tory party to challenge it in court to prevent it from becoming law; if the Tories don't, the Alliance should. Mr. Speaker, I think that speaks to, you know, the feelings that were in existence at that time relative to the need to keep corporate donations in our system and to allow corporate citizens to be able to donate.

There's another issue, Mr. Speaker. While I listened carefully to the Leader of the Opposition discuss the points that they had in deference to the bill and speaking to their rejection of it, I listened carefully to hear the donation limits. I just wanted to confirm a couple of things going back, because I did do some checking back into any discussions relative to this issue in the past: I'm in favour of the donation limits as they exist now and as they will exist in this bill because they did not get changed although I do believe that we had some amendments in that regard.

I want to go back to *Hansard* of May 4, 2009, and the conversation regarding Bill 205 at that time. I'm referring to page 941. This was a conversation that the MLA from Airdrie had at the time. "Contributions by donors to this account would be set at a fair limit of \$30,000 during an election year and \$15,000 in a nonelection year." Indeed, the same kind of comment was in the November 16, 2009, *Hansard*, page 1787, wherein those same fair limits were commented on.

I do think, Mr. Speaker, that we have got the right decision made relative to corporate donations. We've got the right limits in this bill, and I'm supportive of it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I show the Member for Airdrie next. You're relinquishing your spot to the Member for Little Bow?

Mr. Donovan: No, on 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. Standing Order 29(2)(a). My apologies. I was sidetracked here with another flurry of notes.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talk about back and forth and articles from back in 2003. I think we're really trying to move forward on this bill. I think all people in this House are trying to move forward on it. If we could all try to move forward and not go back to eight, nine, 10 years ago on stuff that's being dug out just to prove a point politically, I think everybody would appreciate that. I'd hope the member over there would also appreciate that.

The Speaker: Any others under 29(2)(a)? I have the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, I just wanted to ask the member – and we chatted a bit about this last night – if he has no problem with a corporation spending \$30,000 on a particular candidate in a particular election. That's part of what happens when you open it up to corporations. They have undue influence, and the average voter doesn't have that.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I have never in my lifetime experienced any donations that have affected a decision that's ever been made in this House.

An Hon. Member: And you're old.

Mr. Dorward: And I'm old, according to the good member in front of me here. So I just don't buy that logic. It doesn't make any sense to me.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I have Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona under 29(2)(a). We have three and a half minutes left.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I mean, now, I actually am a fan of holding people to account for their record. I think that on occasion when someone has something on their record and then they make a considered decision to change their mind and they outline in some detail why it is that they've changed their mind and they take responsibility and are very accountable for the fact they've changed their mind, that's totally appropriate. But I'm just wondering why it is that this member thinks it's appropriate to go back to 2003 when we're about to pass a piece of legislation that doesn't allow us to go back past 2009.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Dorward: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the whole concept here is the flip-flop. We have had flip-flop discussions in the press. We've had flip-flop discussions in this House here. We've heard those words yelled back and forth. I guess I do agree. There are times when we should be able to change our opinions based on what Albertans want to hear. But if that's the case for one side of the House, let's have it be the case for the other side of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the hon. member would actually answer the question because the question was actually one of the amendments. How do you reconcile going back to 2003 yet voting against the amendments to hold the government party in power accountable for at least seven years? That was voted down unanimously by the party in power. I'd like to know your reconciliation of that conflict or contradiction.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm honoured. I've sat here for six weeks and desired to be involved in question period, and now I kind of feel like I am, and I'm really honoured.

I know what an apple is, and I know what an orange is. I know what it is to go back and look at a potential flip-flop. I know what

it is to go back on election bills, and one goes back three years, and one goes back more than that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on 29(2)(a).

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: do you honestly agree that for one individual or a group of individuals that based on a certain issue, it's a good thing for them to donate \$430,000? It's something that may have very likely influenced the outcome of the election. Do you think that is a good decision to allow those types of donations to improve our democracy? Are you serious?

The Deputy Speaker: Do you care to respond, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, I think there's an investigation on that going on.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Still on 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). You've got 50 seconds.

3:40

Mr. Anderson: You know, this member and I have a history. I always thought the idea of repentance was that when you realize that you've done something wrong, you go back and admit that you made a mistake. You own up to that mistake, and you make penance for that mistake. Hon. member, you're killing me here. I mean, that's what I thought good people of the world were supposed to do from time to time. This member obviously feels the same as I do. With the ideology that we once had on this issue, once we saw the corruption that happens in politics because of money around the world, in fact – you know what? – we were wrong. We're willing to make that statement in the House. I know it's hard, but listen to me again. We were wrong, and we are going to do everything possible to undo the wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Airdrie on third reading.

Mr. Anderson: All right. Enough with the theology, I guess.

All right. There is a great quote in Alice in Wonderland, a novel that, hopefully, most of us have read. It's about: how can you say that these words mean what you say they mean? The answer to that – I believe it was from the Cheshire cat – was: the words mean whatever you want them to. The words mean whatever you want them to. Now, this Premier is a big fan of Alice in Wonderland. We know that from her budget to the way that she interprets her own words.

The fact is that the last time I checked, truth matters. The last time I checked, people are responsible for the words that they say, and they're responsible for the acts that they do. The last time I checked, we believed in this House in accountability and transparency. The last time I checked, political parties shouldn't be able to be bought off by the highest bidder. The last time I checked, Bill 7 was supposed to be about accountability.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, third reading.

Mr. Anderson: All right. And the last time I checked, we need to talk about the bill on the floor in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Third reading, hon. member. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. So we will do that.

Bill 7, Mr. Speaker, is a huge disappointment. It is a massive missed opportunity. We had an opportunity here to really set a new standard in this country, and instead, to quote the illustrious Deputy Premier, we have decided to remain the bottom-feeders of democracy in this country. This bill does nothing to change our status as the least democratic province in this country. It's a sham. It's a shame. It does very little of what we were hoping that it would accomplish. Very, very little.

The Government House Leader in this House yesterday talked a lot about how we need to just trust that all people are good people and that we shouldn't put any kind of constraints on the ability of people to participate in the democratic process because people are good people. All people are good people. As I said then – I'll say it now – I love the world that that House leader lives in. It's a beautiful world. It's a world of unicorns and rainbows and lollipops. It's a world where everyone holds hands around the campfire. It's a beautiful world. It's a world that I want to be a part of. I want to be a part of that man's world.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that that world is a fairy tale. The fact is that although most people are honest, there are dishonest people. Although most people don't want to wrongly interfere in election results and wrongly interfere in the outcome of elections and aren't only in it for big dollars and so forth, there are some that are. I know that's miraculous for some folks and that this is a huge epiphany for some folks, that there are people that if given the opportunity in a democracy will use every means at their disposal to manipulate with their money, with their time, with their resources and do anything that they can to change the way government functions. There are some of us – there are some elected individuals, I will say – that are perhaps somewhat susceptible to that influence. It has happened time and time again in every democracy across the world.

That goes to the heart of some of the key amendments that we brought forward. There is no doubt that from an ideological point of view, a must protect free speech at all costs, no constraints, no restraints whatsoever view, that an individual should be able to come in and spend \$5 million, \$10 million, split it up among all his friends with 5,000 different tax receipts and say: "You know what? That's fair game. There's nothing wrong with that."

That's a possibility of what happened. It surely looks like a possibility of what happened in the Katz affair. It wasn't \$5 million; it was \$430,000. Granted, there is an investigation going on, I think. We don't really know, but we think. We think that it looks like \$430,000, one cheque, which the government has never denied and which was reported in two newspapers. Now, they could be wrong. Granted, they could be wrong, so we'll wait for the investigation to conclude, but the government hasn't denied it. That amount, \$430,000, was split between several different donors, and the tax receipts were sent out.

Now, apparently the PC Party says that's all above board. Okay? All right. Well, that's great. The problem is that the public is extremely offended by what happened. They are offended by it. They think that it is ridiculous that somebody should be able to come in when the donation limit is already an astronomical \$30,000 per individual or corporate entity or union – it's already through the roof, the highest in the nation, anyway – and be able to circumvent that rule, that already kind of out-of-the-park rule, by signing one cheque and giving it and saying, "Now send the tax receipt to this person for \$15,000, this person for \$15,000, this person for \$15,000," and down the line.

How is that in line with the spirit of the elections law that's on the books? It isn't. It looks awful. It feels awful. It feels icky, Mr. Speaker. Doesn't it feel icky? I think it feels icky. It does feel icky and not just because that was used last week in the most amazingly well co-ordinated fear-and-smear campaign that this province has ever seen by that side of the House. Not only is it icky because it funded that, those personal attacks. We know that that side doesn't like personal attacks except during the last week of the election, when they call us all bigots and racists: oh, don't question us on our accountability, you bigots and racists. Like, come on. The double standard is just a little much to take.

Mr. Horner: I'll say.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, exactly. It's brutal. It's amazing the double standard that does occur in this Legislature.

People are absolutely disgusted that an individual – it doesn't matter who the individual was – is able to come in and influence an election in that way. Then you put on top of that the fact that \$100 million right now is being sought by that individual or the corporation that that individual is a part of to get a new arena in Edmonton.

The Finance minister says: I was never influenced on that. That may be true, Finance minister. I'm glad you say that. I'm hoping to believe you on it. In fact, I may even take a chance here and say that I do believe you on it, but the optics are awful. They're brutal. It makes it look like this government is open to being bought by the highest bidder on this issue. That's what it looks like, and we can't have that. We can't have those optics.

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. This is on the bill.

We have to close that Katz donation loophole. That's why we brought that amendment. It doesn't pass the smell test. We brought two amendments, an amendment and a subamendment, on this issue. One was to say that you cannot make a donation on behalf of individuals. Then the Government House Leader eloquently stood up and said that that would affect his ability to hold a lobster boil. So we said: okay, we're going to make sure that that Government House Leader is able to have all the lobster boils his heart can imagine, and we are going to bring in an amendment that says that you can't make a donation on behalf of someone in excess of \$15,000. Still that was unreasonable because, apparently, the Government House Leader charges \$15,000 a plate at his lobster boils. That's the only reason I can think of that he would reject that. It is absolutely ridiculous for this government not to accept that. So that was the first major one.

Dr. Sherman: Lobster?

3:50

Mr. Anderson: That's right. It was the Katz lobster boil amendment. It was a beauty, and it was rejected.

Now, the second. I love how this government across claims to be progressive, so progressive: look how progressive we are. Then it's the Wildrose with the support of the Liberals and NDs that comes forward and says: "You know what? We have seen the stench and the stink that big money has on the democratic process, that it has on government decisions, and we are not going to take part in that any more as a province." That's what we should be doing. This government's comeback is: "Well, you guys took corporate donations before, too. So you've got to be principled here and not do it anymore." Well, obviously, as a party we are not suicidal. We are not going to bring a knife to a gunfight.

Obviously, until the rules are changed for everybody, we are still going to accept corporate donations. [interjections] Oh, horror. I know. Horror. That's right.

The fact is that on day one – well, I don't know about day one, but in the first year: can we say that, hon. leader?

Ms Smith: I think so.

Mr. Anderson: In the first year of a Wildrose government we will ban corporate and union donations. That is what Albertans want to see. Get big money out. Get it out, especially as it appertains to corporate and union donations. I know that's not the most ideologically pure thing for a conservative to say, but the fact is that when you see the effect it has had on the transmission line debacle, on this whole Katz issue, and on many other issues, I just think it's the right thing to do, and I think most Albertans feel it's the right thing to do.

There are many other issues. We saw 24 amendments brought forward by the opposition. Our hon. leader did a remarkable job of listing all the different amendments that were rejected by this government out of hand. I do want to say that I find it absolutely offensive, in my view, that this governing party undertook to change election laws involving political parties. They went to the PC Party, and they asked them for their thoughts on amending the election laws. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? They did not consult at all prior to tabling the bill or having the three-column document in front of them. They did not go to the NDP Party, did not go to the Liberal Party, did not go to the Wildrose Party to ask for any input.

This whole idea that this government believes in consultation is garbage. They believe in consultation with their friends. That's what they believe in. They consult their friends on every bill and say: what can we do for you? They put it in the bill. They don't talk to anybody that might disagree with them, that might have a different perspective. No matter whether it's land-use legislation, whether it's election legislation, whether it's legislation about lollipops and unicorns, they only talk to their friends on the legislation, and it's ridiculous. They're invited guests.

Then this Treasury Board president keeps saying: "Well, why didn't you show up to some of these consultations on the budget, for example? Why didn't you show up to some of these?" Because we tried to show up for the health ones, and we were told we couldn't come in. We just assumed we couldn't go to the financial ones.

It's absolutely ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. McIver: Burn your bra, Rob.

Mr. Anderson: Well, the Minister of Transportation just told me to burn my bra, or in my case it would be a 'mansierre.' I'm not going to burn my mansierre. I quite like my mansierre. I think that this shows again the decorum on that side of the House. Once again, just amazing decorum. Amazing decorum.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a bill that I can support because it is a bill that is in my view completely hypocritical in every way, shape, and form. Now, because we have this foreign concept of free votes that just seems to defy all logic for some folks over there, there may be one or two folks over here – or three or four or 10; who knows? – that are going to vote for this bill because they believe that it is a start.

We just finished potty training my children, for example, and we give them Smarties when they go in the toilet. Even when they miss it nine times, if they get it once, we give them a Smartie. I think that's kind of the idea here. Some of them want to give a Smartie because they hit the toilet on a couple of things. Unfortun-

nately, they keep missing the toilet on everything else. That is the problem, and that's why I cannot give them candy and support their bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Sherwood Park, would you take your seat, please.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's not entirely a pleasure to get up and speak to Bill 7 on third reading, a bill that we will in our caucus be voting against. [interjections] I know it's a big shocker over there. I gave some thought to how I would approach this issue and how I would talk about it.

You know, today in question period I thought about the workings of the Election Act and how important it is to Albertans. Today in question period I heard the Premier say again, over and over, that she did not make a certain decision. She said that even though there is not one, Mr. Speaker, not two, not three, not four, but five documents from four separate people, including the Premier herself, which say that she made that decision.

Now, I understand that the Speaker of this House has made a ruling about that. Apparently, we all need to determine inside this House that it's possible to have two sets of facts, two sets of the truth, and that's why it's okay for the Premier to have said what she said, notwithstanding the documentary record, which is clearly there for everybody to see.

The relevance of that issue to this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that at some point, somewhere, somehow the Premier needs to be held accountable for having a version of events which clearly only exists in a different dimension, in a different galaxy somewhere. This bill is extremely important because this bill includes the rules around the process through which Albertans will eventually be able to hold this Premier accountable for advocating a set of facts which are contradicted by not one, not two, not three, not four, but five separate documents. Sooner or later she has to be held accountable, but she will only be held accountable if we have an Election Act which ensures genuine fairness of the process.

So let's talk about that Election Act and the process that led up to that Election Act. Well, like everything else in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, that process was flawed, and that process was geared to ensure that people on one side of the House got unfair access and unfair influence as to how those rules were devised. Now, it's fine when you are in government. Of course, we all understand how legislation works. We understand the role of the executive branch of government in coming up with legislation and discussing it with the governing caucus and putting that to the Assembly. We all understand that. But there are certain areas, certain issues which rest appropriately not in the executive branch of government, not over in the government caucus, but squarely in the centre of this Assembly because those are rules which impact this Assembly as a whole.

One of those areas is elections law. It is fundamental to democracy that elections law is developed fairly. That's why we have a Chief Electoral Officer, and that's why usually in the normal course of things in healthy democracies, which this is not, but nonetheless, the rules are developed through the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer with fair and open consultation with all elected members of the Assembly.

But, Mr. Speaker, that didn't happen in this case. In this case one side of the House got the recommendations three months

before the rest of us did. The government got the recommendations. The government got the rules, and they got to play with them, and by the very admission of one of the speakers on that side they got to talk to their party volunteers. They got to consult with them on it. We had it dumped on us a little over a week ago. Then we had the government bring in a notice of motion to give themselves the authority at any time to sever debate to four hours. They use that as a means of bullying their way into having this bill discussed at this point in the day with very, very little debate.

4:00

As has already been outlined in a great deal of detail by the Official Opposition leader, there have been copious amendments proposed to this legislation by opposition members in an effort to restore the balance that exists within this legislation. In amendment after amendment after amendment after amendment the folks on that side voted it down, and they voted it down in a very fast way, without really having a fulsome discussion because, again, they wanted to get out of here at a certain point. They used the threat of closure to negotiate a severed debate, a shortened debate, on this issue when they've already had three months to deliberate on it and we've had one week. Mr. Speaker, I mean, it's just part and parcel of how things run here.

You know, I said it yesterday, but I'm going to say it again. When people over there complain about decorum in this Assembly, I say: look in the mirror. Because when you play it that way, you get what comes to you, and you need to own the consequences that you create. Again, it sounds like I'm talking to kids. Everyone keeps having this analogy where you're talking to kids, simple basic rules that you apply to kids, and once again I'm in the position of having to do that just as previous speakers on the opposition side were. I wish that wasn't the case. I wish we didn't need to speak that way to members of the government.

Anyway, we have a flawed, flawed piece of legislation, and we're being asked to vote on it. For that reason, we will vote against it because it is so incredibly flawed.

Now, there were a lot of amendments that were put forward, and it's hard in the brief amount of time that I have, Mr. Speaker, to speak to this. I think I have – I don't know – about nine minutes left to really go over in great, great detail all the problems that exist in this legislation. Let me start by saying that what you need to be able to do is ensure that every different type of stakeholder in this system is represented. I outlined before that we have at least two elements of this legislation which quite intentionally discriminate against small parties. You know, it's to be expected. You get a big party that goes behind closed doors, comes up with their own set of rules, rams it through. Hardly surprising that we come up with a set of rules that discourage the success and ability of small parties. Not only in terms of the filing requirements but also in terms of the shortening of the nomination day, there's a clear intention to make it more challenging for small parties. Hardly surprising.

When you look at the funding limits – and this has already been outlined – these guys think that it's totally reasonable for somebody to walk in and write a cheque for \$30,000 to their favourite candidate. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the median individual income in Alberta is \$36,000 a year. How many folks are going to walk in and write a cheque for \$30,000? I'll tell you how many. I'll tell you who they are. I hate to use an oft-referred to phrase, but they're the 1 per cent. Those are the folks that are going to say: "Oh, 30 grand? Whatever. I'll write that. Go. Then I'll call you after you're elected, and we'll have lunch. We'll have a conversation about some of my issues. No pressure, but here's your cheque for 30 grand." That's how it works. But the median

income in Alberta after taxes is less than what these guys want to be able to accept from their friends and insiders.

Again, it ensures that the big parties who are in control get to stay in control. It's the winning team. Apparently, part of winning is that you get to hire the ref and you get to remake the rules so that next year everyone is really surprised when you win again. That's what this government is doing in terms of accountability, transparency, fairness, all that kind of stuff.

What else are they doing? Well, according to the Justice minister they're planning on not just supplementing their enumeration process; they plan on eliminating in-person enumeration and going to a system of solely relying on tax records. I have some extreme concerns about that. I've had concerns about the effort of the Chief Electoral Officer and the resources that he's been provided, through a majority decision of the committee that oversees him, in terms of being able to get everyone on the electoral list who's often left off of it. People who move often, who are marginally housed, students: those people are less likely to be on the voters list. Certainly, with the new plans they are less likely to be on the voters list. Hardly surprising that this is the kind of thing that provides an advantage to the governing party.

Expense limits. Again, our party proposed that there should be a cap on how much people spend on elections. There are election spending caps throughout this country, Mr. Speaker. Federal election spending caps for ridings which are three times the size of our provincial ridings are lower than what a significant number of members on that side of the House spent on their election last time. There is no need to have to spend as much as you want to get elected. You know, if an MP can get themselves elected with \$85,000 or whatever the limit is – it's something around that – there is no reason why an Alberta MLA cannot get themselves elected for half that. But, no, we're not going to put a cap on expenses. We're going to keep open the opportunity to buy our path to victory. That's really important for them.

Probably one of the single biggest things when it comes to funding, of course, is the very unfortunate debacle that we've had to observe with respect to the Katz donation, the loopholes that exist in our legislation, and the resolute refusal on the part of this government to close that loophole because it's a loophole they want to be able to reach through at any time and take full advantage of. Again, this legislation does not deal with the fact that somebody can walk in, write a cheque for \$450,000, and provide up to a third of the money raised by a particular political party three days before the election.

I don't know how you can look at that situation and not get worried about the integrity of our electoral system. I think the average person, when presented with those facts, is perplexed at the unwillingness of this government to fix the problem, and they are left to draw their own conclusions. Mr. Speaker, those conclusions are not positive ones.

The other thing this legislation fails to do is that it fails to ban corporate and union donations. I had an opportunity to talk about it yesterday. Again, it's the kind of thing that makes sense to make sure that our electoral system belongs to citizens and not to bank accounts. That's what we tried to do on the opposition side. The government, clearly aware that the majority of their funds come from corporations, the very folks who then call them up and ask them to go out for lunch a few weeks later, was unwilling to close that loophole. Again, this does not reflect well on the integrity of the folks on the other side.

The final thing that I want to talk about is the way in which this government has structured the regulation of this act to cover up their past misdeeds. They had the gall, I would say, to argue that this legislation opens up disclosure. That, Mr. Speaker, is quite

ridiculous. Yes, a bit of information going back three years will come forward; i.e., information, files that have already been opened. Not all of them, just to be clear. According to the Chief Electoral Officer roughly 40 per cent of them will be lost to that three-year limitation period, so a lot of that information, a lot of that illegal activity will never be made known to Albertans. This government fully knew that when they identified the three-year limitation period.

They then added a new limitation period, Mr. Speaker. It used to be that the Chief Electoral Officer could impose an administrative penalty as far back as was necessary. Now they can only go back three years. Just to be absolutely clear so everyone understands this, this new elections act will ensure that the Premier's sister will never be subjected to any penalty, nor will we ever know about anything that would happen to her – well, actually, it wouldn't matter because she'll just never be subjected to any penalty.

The fact of the matter is that this was an extremely self-interested crafting of the legislation. It was crafted by one team in the tournament. They kept it to themselves. They were very intentional in how they put it forward. They ensured that the rules were constructed to bring about their advantage and no one else's advantage. It is a travesty to suggest that this is anything bordering on fair, transparent, or accountable.

4:10

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, to go back to my original point, the fact that the Premier got up today and said that she did not make a decision, a statement which was contradicted by not one, not two, not three, not four, but five pieces of documented evidence – I am not entirely sure that she'll ever be held accountable by Albertans because the rules have been crafted in such a way as to give as much advantage to the Conservative Party as possible.

It will really be a challenge for Albertans who are truly interested in having a Premier who will give them the straight goods, who will tell the truth in a way that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to hear your comments, hon. member, about what impact you think this process and this outcome will have on the average Albertan. Do they care about the Election Accountability Amendment Act?

Ms Notley: Well, I think the Member for Calgary-Mountain View raises a really important question because I think that what's happening is that Albertans are becoming very alienated by our democratic process. They're alienated by the rule-fixing that goes on over and over, and they feel disconnected from their democratic system. There is absolutely no question that this set of rules will only serve to enhance that particular feeling. So, ironically, the very interest that ought to be there for this particular piece of legislation is probably being thwarted by this piece of legislation and has been thwarted by the conduct of this government over many, many, many years.

It's certainly my hope that at a certain point Albertans will see what this legislation is designed to do, what it's designed to hide, what it's designed to keep from them. I guess we'll only see three and a half years from now, not at a particular date, of course, because notwithstanding the fact that the Premier promised to give us an exact date when we'd know when we'd next have an election, she didn't do that either. So at some point in the future during an election window, season, time, phase of the moon we

may find out what Albertans think about the credibility of this government on issues of honesty and integrity and fairness.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others on 29(2)(a)? The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. member if she would still think it was important or beneficial to have the ban on corporate donations if the \$3,000 maximum would have applied as the most that any corporation or any individual could donate and especially coupled with real teeth in the legislation, where the allegation of the \$430,000 couldn't apply, where people have to actually donate their own money from their own funds?

Ms Notley: Well, that's an interesting question. There's no doubt that had there been a cap on the donations, bringing it down from \$30,000 to the \$3,000 that our caucus proposed, the issue of who's making those donations would become somewhat less important. But I do think at the end of the day that corporations don't vote; unions don't vote. People vote. People are the ones who should donate. So there's another objective that is met there by banning union and corporate donations. But the member raises a good point, that had the government been prepared to drop the limit from \$30,000 to \$3,000, part of those issues around corruption, around influencing, all those kinds of things could have been addressed.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 7. I've always taken the vantage point that when the government does something that makes sense, that's in the public good, we should support it regardless of which party we're in. If it's something that's actually of good intent, which is, you know, half or 60 per cent good, we should have an opportunity to suggest improvements so that we could make it 95 per cent good, maybe 100 per cent. But when it's complete nonsense, then opposition should absolutely oppose.

Now, there are some good things in this bill, Mr. Speaker. There are some good things in this bill. I'm glad that university students can vote. That's a good thing. I'm glad that they followed many of the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Now, the problem with this bill is that it's analogous to an omnibus bill, where you lump in a whole bunch of good ideas with a whole bunch of rotten ideas. All the elected members are in a quandary, where you actually want to support these good ideas, but you can't support the rotten ones. If you vote for the bill to support the five, six good ideas, then you're actually voting to support the rotten ideas as well. That's a problem with these omnibus bills when you stick four major bills into one thing.

You know, it's teamwork, Mr. Speaker – it's teamwork as good as it gets – to unanimously vote down every amendment, every idea offered by everyone else in every political party, who says: "You know what? Hey, a good try." In fact, let us all work together as elected members to try to make this 95 per cent. We all agree: hey, this thing is at about 60 per cent, maybe 65 per cent. But I'll tell you that in the world I come from, that ain't good enough; 65 per cent is not good enough. In the world in which we live, in this province, as great as it is, the citizens demand 95 to 100 per cent.

I can't believe 100 per cent of the recommendations got unanimously voted down. Now, Mr. Speaker, I can understand teamwork. I came from that team, and I can understand the tire tracks that will be on your back if you disagree. I'm still trying to wear some of those tire tracks off my back. I know the tire tracks on the whip's back over there. He's constantly under the bus, regularly, and he honourably does it.

Mr. Speaker, this is really about democracy. It's about trust. It's about rebuilding trust with the public. We are here to serve the public. Government's job is to equalize, to create equality of opportunity for all Albertans, to give everybody a fair chance. In Darwinism, survival of the fittest – well, jeez, even Darwin wouldn't support this bill because this has given a bigger opportunity to the guys that already have an unfair chance, who are already doing extraordinarily well. But I will give them a C plus for a college try.

You know, the opposition parties have raised many issues. What I'm a little surprised about – this is a conservative party, a conservative party, the federal Conservative Party. Now, guys in the Wildrose, please stop calling them liberals because there ain't nothing liberal about these guys. Nothing liberal about these guys.

Mrs. Forsyth: What are they?

Dr. Sherman: Well, they're neither progressive nor conservative, just corrupt and incompetent.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, you have the floor.

Dr. Sherman: Even the federal Conservative Party and the federal Liberal Party and the federal ND Party and the federal Green Party abide by setting donation limits of \$1,100 maximum and limiting corporate and union donations, limiting influence from a small group of people, an influence that will affect a decision on a majority of people.

Well, you know, I can sort of understand because it's a really old, tired, 41-year-old party. They're still living in the past. Our decisions are to improve our democracy for the future. Now, there are many intelligent members on that side. There are many intelligent members – I know them – very smart people. But in the words of the hon. member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, this legislation is feeble, it's weak, it's pale, it's insufficient, and it's poor. It's poor, and it does not address the deficiencies in our democracy.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the deficiencies in our democracy. Last time I checked, we've got Illegal-donationgate going on here. We tabled all this Warlord-politics Donationgate. Many members of Alberta said: hey, this is just how business is done here, forcing universities and colleges and municipal leaders, everyone . . . [interjection] We brought 40 of these forward, and we still haven't got answers. The last time I checked, we got Tobaccogate. The last time I checked, we got Intimidationgate. The last time I checked, we got Fudge-it Budgetgate. The last time I checked, we got Showergate. Showergate: "If you're a disabled or vulnerable Albertan, we'll give you one shower – that's it – because the buddy that gave me that donation won't make any money if he gives you a second shower." Holy cow. We've got a family plan.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you still on third reading of the bill, hon. member?

Dr. Sherman: Oh, absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue, then.

Dr. Sherman: This is the worst decision money could buy, the worst government money could buy, corrupt and incompetent government.

The last time I checked, we got Environmentgate. Mr. Speaker, these guys have been given a lottery ticket. A lottery ticket. Any province, any state, any country in the world would love to have a 4 per cent unemployment rate, \$90-a-barrel oil, the hardest working labour workforce on the planet, hard-working men, women, and children from across the planet in search of a dream and opportunity. But what did the money buy? What did the money buy? The last time I checked, it bought Princess Flip-flop as a Premier. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Dr. Sherman: The last time I checked, Mr. Speaker, it brought us one of the biggest spending governments, with the worst outcomes and results in the country: one of the lowest high school completion rates in the country, one of the lowest postsecondary participation rates in the country, one of the highest spending, lowest performing health care systems in the country. We're nickel and diming the wonderful people – the veterans, the seniors – who built this great province and this great country. We're nickel and diming them.

Now, we've got to get back to the election campaign finances and contributions rules. We've got to fix these rules. Interested parties that donate tens of thousands of dollars, hundreds of thousands of dollars from some, for leadership campaigns and for election campaigns are able to get decisions that are not necessarily in the best interests of the people.

I challenge every political party in this Legislature to run an election campaign on a \$150,000 central budget. I tell you that even the NDP outspent us 4 to 1, and they're good guys.

But I can understand why they need \$4 million, \$5 million for an election campaign. If she had to work hard, door to door, and earn it, with no money in the bank, they wouldn't win. I question if they would be able to win. As a Liberal in Alberta you get 9 per cent of the vote, and you pick up five seats. We spent next to nothing.

It's no surprise that they don't want a level playing field. I'm glad they've decided to put everything public. That's a good thing. But they're really rubbing it in people's faces, saying: "You know what? We're going to keep making these decisions, and we're going to keep getting the donations, and there's nothing you can do about it. We're going to keep winning."

Mr. Speaker, I would really urge the government – you know what? I would actually urge the backbenchers in that government. Government is really the Premier and cabinet. The backbenchers in that government are new. Well, many of you are new. I would urge you to vote against your government's bill because what you're actually going to do is endorse a lot of this stuff. You're going to pass a bill that's only 65 per cent, and you're going to be held accountable in the next election. You are. I caution you because on the off-chance that the Liberals get one \$15,000 donation, if we have half a million dollars in a campaign – I'm keeping my Liberal vote next election and stealing the real progressive vote back from you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's try to improve democracy, the trust in decision-making. You know, I'm disappointed that good people across the way have an opportunity to do something fantastic.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing I want to say: to lower the limit to \$250 almost seems as though they're going after the little guy, the little guy that has given, you know, 300 bucks. Three hundred bucks ain't a heck of a lot. It almost seems like they just want to find out who their donors are by lowering the limit. Because these guys raised a million bucks under \$375, you'd almost sort of question whether part of this bill was actually intended to get their donors to give less. They're going after the little guy. This is the big-guy bill going after the little guy.

Now, it would be a fair and balanced bill if they did that but combined that with decreasing maximum contributions. Guys, would you consider five grand? Would you consider three grand? One grand?

Mr. Mason: Let's make a deal.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Sherman: Let's make a deal. Let's consider eliminating corporate and union donations. Even the NDP wants to get rid of union donations. I think that's a good thing. [interjection] Oh, they don't? I'll take that one back, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I would fully support what we've done in the federal government, limiting leadership campaign finance donations. I think \$30,000 is too much. I think 20 grand is too much. I think 15 grand is too much. I think 10 grand is too much. I think five grand is too much.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask every member on that side to reconsider, especially the backbenchers. I recognize that you're not in government, but at the end of the day the true people who have power are the backbenchers. Private members on that side, you have more power than cabinet right here. You do. Consider not supporting this bill unanimously.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I cannot support this bill although there are many very good elements in this bill. They are some very good elements in this bill. To some of those organizations: I'm so sorry. I would love to support those elements if it just wasn't an omnibus bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Fawcett: I love the rhetoric coming from this hon. member. I just pulled up the election finance disclosure from the Liberal candidate that ran against me in the last election, went on to his disclosure. Remember that I believe the donation limit to a candidate in an election year is \$2,000, right? This candidate received a donation from Blake Rand, an in-kind donation of \$8,782; from the Belfry, \$5,440; and from Quality Hotel, \$10,000. I'm not sure that this leader and his party have the moral authority to really speak on this particular legislation in the way that he is.

Speaker's Ruling Third Reading Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, your Speaker has been listening to the debate even from elsewhere. However, I'm going to remind you again that the purpose of third reading is not much different than the purpose of second reading. What is always at purpose is relevance. Relevance has many different ways, shapes, and forms of being described, but one of them is to stick to things that are in the bill. That applies to all of you equally. So let's please try and keep the debate on third reading of Bill 7, which is correctly titled Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012.

Debate Continued

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the allegations that the member brought up, the donations. I ask him to table them in the House, and I ask him to refer them to the Chief Electoral Officer.

4:30

The Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you were not rising under 29(2)(a), were you?

Mr. Anglin: A question under 29(2)(a), that's correct.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Anglin: That's correct.

The Speaker: Then proceed, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Anglin: I just would like to ask the hon. member: if the allegations are correct – I won't dispute whether they are or not – how would that affect your reporting your party as far as compliance if it was greater than three years?

The Speaker: Well, again, hon. members, you'd better tie your response to the bill, please. Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, hon. member. I don't know what he's talking about. I personally in my own constituency have a policy of not looking at who donated and how much they donated because I don't want any decision I make to be biased. The Liberal Party makes decisions that are in the best interests of the public and the best interests of the people, and we advocate. We've never been in the position to make the ultimate decision. If the hon. member has any allegation of any impropriety, I ask him to table it in the House. I ask him to refer it to the Chief Electoral Officer. In fact, I ask them to pass legislation where the Chief Electoral Officer brings this up. [interjections]

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the President of Treasury Board. Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: We're still on 29(2)(a)? I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to talk a little bit about spending limits as opposed to donation limits. I was wondering what position he took on that.

Dr. Sherman: I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for asking a very important question. You know, I believe we need to take a holistic, comprehensive approach to election and leadership campaign financing rules. I think we should have a debate on what is the maximum amount you should spend. I believe that's a very important debate to have. In fact, perhaps we should look at what the federal government has done. Or – you know what? – you get X number of votes; you get X amount. Every political party gets an opportunity to run a fair election in each constituency, and every party has the resources. I think that's a very fair question by the hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, it's hard to have a debate here when the party that makes the ultimate decisions shoots down every amendment that any opposition party makes and limits the time on how long you can debate these ideas, and then they run out of the Legislature as fast as they can because Santa is on his way.

To the hon. member: a very good question. I'm very open to having that debate. Like I said, hey, it would be great if you set campaign expenditure limits for political parties at \$150,000. I'd love to see how these guys can compete, although \$150,000 is probably unreasonably low.

Thank you, hon. member.

The Speaker: The President of Treasury Board. Seven seconds.

Mr. Horner: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said he doesn't know who or how much they contributed to his campaign, yet it's going to change his decision.

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. We'll move on to the next speaker, the hon. member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take too long. I know that this bill has been thoroughly addressed by the Leader of the Official Opposition as well as the Government House Leader, but I am pleased as the Wildrose Justice critic to rise today and speak to the Election Accountability Amendment Act. However, I'm not so pleased with the content or, rather, the lack of substantive content in this act. To fully understand how this act came about, it is helpful to look at the events leading up to Bill 7, and for my constituents it hits close to home.

Last year there was a CBC investigation that revealed that a municipality in my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills had made significant and ongoing illegal donations to the PC Party. From this investigation it became clear to my constituents, indeed to all Albertans, that the PCs had blurred the lines between government and party, with municipalities stuck in the middle. They broke the law consistently over a number of years. The PC Party solicited heavily for these illegal donations, with the implication that if municipalities didn't pay up, they wouldn't get funding. This put municipalities, colleges, and other prohibited corporations in a tight spot.

Further news reports revealed that this problem was not confined just to my constituency of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It appeared to be a deliberate and methodical means of raising funds, more or less exploiting the taxpayer, by the PC Party in government. This is just wrong, Mr. Speaker, and nothing in this act has changed that.

Now, many people throughout Alberta thought that the government, embarrassed by scandal after scandal after scandal of illegal donations, would do something to fix the problem. In my constituency as Justice critic I've heard time and time again that laws regarding political donations need to be strengthened so this can never happen again. The government has commended itself for bringing forward Bill 7, but let's please hold the applause because it seems that while pretending to respond to the ongoing scandal of illegal donations to the PC Party, Bill 7 does absolutely nothing that could in any way be interpreted as putting an end to the illegal donations, illegally solicited and accepted by the PC Party. Bill 7 does nothing to make political parties caught red-handed pay back the money they've accepted. There are no provisions to penalize political parties that do this and nothing to punish repeat offenders like the PC Party, which seems to rely heavily on illegal donations for its lifeblood.

What the Wildrose has done is called for the full disclosure and evidence that illegal donations have actually been repaid. Of course, we've called for this to be retroactive seven years and for a mandatory requirement that the Chief Electoral Officer publicly report any transgressions or any wrongdoings. Unfortunately, the act as it stands now only goes back three years, and it only goes back three years from the date of proclamation. That could be a

year from now, and a bunch of illegal donations that have been found by the Chief Electoral Officer will never be brought to light. I think that's a shame, that where someone in this province has been caught with illegally soliciting or accepting a donation, it will never be made public, Mr. Speaker. No other modern democracy currently would allow such an outdated method of elections financing.

Next, after a single donor was allegedly caught making a \$430,000 donation to a particular party, one that appeared to be a bailout of that party in a time of need and a time of despair, one may have assumed that the government would be seeking to clarify rules so that such an instance would never happen again. The Wildrose put forward an amendment to ensure that one person or entity cannot donate on behalf of another entity. That seemed to be a very reasonable amendment to stop that type of situation from happening. One can only assume that by rejecting that amendment, it was a deliberate attempt to allow that loophole to continue, and I think that's wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The problems with Bill 7 don't just stop there. Bill 7 continues to allow corporate and union donations. In today's age the public just doesn't feel comfortable with unions and corporations and big money exercising undue influence in the electoral process.

I think that Albertans think a lot differently than the government on this, and I've heard a lot from my constituents on it. Bill 7 in the end virtually allows and ensures that election scandals will occur and will continue to occur. We could have had a first-class piece of legislation that led our country, led western democracies. Instead, this bill falls flat. Albertans deserve better.

I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Speaker's Ruling Third Reading Debate

The Speaker: Let me just take 20 seconds to briefly remind all members in an educational sense about *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 788, with respect to third reading. It says in a nutshell: "Debate at this stage of the legislative process focuses on the final form of the bill. The amendments that are admissible at this stage are similar to those that were admissible at second reading stage." Let's just keep that in mind as we move forward.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Seeing that there's no one under 29(2)(a), we'll move on to the hon. leader of the New Democratic opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 7, the Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012. I want to begin by talking about how election finance and election legislation ought to be developed and contrast that to the way that this bill was developed.

The major stakeholders in election financing legislation are, first and foremost, the citizens, the people who make up the democracy and whose participation in the process is essential to make sure that we have a free, fair, and completely above board electoral system. There are other stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, and primary among those are the political parties themselves. They are significant stakeholders because their actions, their functions, and their activities are governed by this legislation. They are major

components of our electoral democracy, and they deserve to be consulted in the development of legislation.

Unfortunately, that did not happen in the development of this bill. We don't know what consultation took place with the Progressive Conservative Party. I think we may never know that, but I certainly assume that it was significant and extensive. I do know that there was no consultation with any other political party in the development of this legislation.

When I challenged the Minister of Justice on this very point, he attempted to argue that the bill briefings that were offered to the caucuses that are in the Legislature comprise consultation. Of course, Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. Once the bill was drafted, then the opposition parties were given the courtesy of a briefing as to what's in the bill. It's not to the party; it's to the legislative caucus of the party. They are two different things, at least in our party and, in my experience, in the opposition parties as well. They're not the same thing. The LAO, for example, is quite vigilant to make sure that there's no crossover or confusion between the legislative caucus of a party and a political party. In fact, I think they go to extremes from time to time in their diligence in enforcing that principle.

There are many political parties in this province that are not currently represented in this Legislature, and they, of course, would not be given the courtesy of a bill briefing because they're not part of the Legislature, all of which puts the lie to the argument that somehow political parties other than the Progressive Conservative Party were in fact consulted on this legislation. They were not. We were not. We know that the Liberals were not. We know that the Wildrose was not. We know that other smaller political parties that aren't here were not consulted either. Now, if you contrast that with the consultation that did take place, for example, with postsecondary students, with municipalities, and so on, you'll see that the government is capable of actually consulting with stakeholders if they want to. Clearly, they did not want to in this case.

So the bill, Mr. Speaker, is tainted from the beginning because of its one-sided development by a government who intends to hold onto power at any cost. The bill is not going to do anything, does not contain any provisions which might be contrary to the interests of the Progressive Conservative Party and to holding onto power. You can see that when you get into the meat of the bill, when you see the provisions that are there.

This bill will provide a limit of three years on how far you can look back at illegal donations. Many significant cases involving illegal donations to the Progressive Conservative Party, by Progressive Conservative operatives in many cases, took place before the statute of limitations imposed by this bill, and there are almost a hundred documented cases, Mr. Speaker, of illegal donations that have been made. We know that some of them have been investigated because we've asked and other political parties and some citizens have asked in some cases for these to be investigated. Of course, the Chief Electoral Officer has refused to disclose the details of the investigations or penalties or the persons who were involved.

This will change for offences that occurred within the last three years but not before, so the government has closed the door on investigating these things. In fact, the government seems to be very keen on making sure that all of the transgressions in the past are forgotten and that we look to the future. They ask us to accept their assurances that when it comes to expenses from health authorities or when it comes to illegal campaign donations or when it comes to many other things, they've changed their stripes, that they're not the same old cat that they used to be, and that the

41 years that they've had in power are no longer affecting how they operate.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't accept that. I don't think that many members on this side of the House or many Albertans accept that this PC government is going to operate in a more honest and straightforward way. They are, in fact, the serial offender when it comes to illegal campaign donations in this province, and I have scant hope that the provisions in this legislation will change that.

Another thing I think is very important, and it's been raised by other political parties here. I know that the Wildrose made an amendment to eliminate corporate donations, which was of course shot down by the PC majority. I would like to personally welcome the Wildrose to that position. I know it's a new one for them, but I think that it does provide for a government and an electoral process that is less controlled by big money and by special interests, and I think that that's very important.

Mr. Speaker, we did a little bit of research. The Progressive Conservative Party in the last election got 65 per cent of its campaign donations from corporate interests. Sixty-five per cent. You know, you can't be surprised about that if you look at their legislation, if you look at the kinds of things that they stand for and the interests that they serve. The oil and gas industry is a major one. Law firms do very well by this government, as does business generally.

You can look in all sorts of areas: how they approach issues, why they are always flirting with private health care. The government spends I think close to \$12 billion on health care. Most of it goes for public goods and services. Now, the private interests that see this – yes, the private interests that see this – money being spent are pretty excited by the possibility that some of that could come to them, so they make contributions to the PC Party.

4:50

We see the result of that in the approach that the PCs take in this area and in all sorts of areas. The lack of environmental oversight in terms of oil sands activity, in terms of fracking, in terms of conventional oil and gas: all of those things place corporate interests ahead of the environment. They place corporate interests ahead of the interests of ordinary people. You don't have to look much past their appalling labour legislation, the worst in the country. It makes it very difficult to form unions, provides no protection to farm workers. All of this is a reflection of who's financing the PC Party and, therefore, making sure that the influence that they have with the government remains dominant.

So those are things that we would like to see. We would like to see limits on spending overall. A more level playing field in terms of election finance is, in fact, in the best interests of the public, but it's not in the interests of the PC Party, obviously, and that's really why they wouldn't support it. There are a range of changes that we would like to see, Mr. Speaker, to make things more open, more fair, more balanced, to take big money out of politics, to make sure that the ordinary citizen is the driving force and the subject of the political activity of this province.

Before I conclude, I want to say that there are some positive things here with respect to making it easier for students to vote, for providing more clarity and openness with respect to municipal election financing, and so on.

I'll just mention that there are some components here amending the Senatorial Selection Act, Mr. Speaker. We would just as soon get rid of that altogether. We were the first party to talk in this country about Senate reform, and we believe in the triple-A Senate: abolish, abolish, abolish. They're redundant. We don't need more government, more elected politicians, or more appointed politicians to govern this country. That's my hope for

the Wildrose's next step in their political development, that they will come to see that true Senate reform involves the abolition of that house of patronage.

Ms Notley: Climate change.

Mr. Mason: My honourable colleague says climate change, but I can't hope for the moon. But I do think that getting rid of the Senate and these silly Senate elections would be a very positive step as well, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, I want to say that the bill was flawed from the beginning because it was developed by a government that only talks to itself. It doesn't talk to other political parties. It doesn't think they have a legitimate role, and we've seen that from the conduct of business in the House during this session. The government's arrogance, disdain for the democratic principles of this Assembly, and contempt for the opposition have been more than evident. They won't answer questions. They won't hold people accountable. They won't take responsibility. It's pretty clear that the flaws in this bill have their root in the same flaws of how the government is dealing with the entire legislative agenda that we've seen in this fall session of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there are a number of positive aspects of this bill that we'd like to support if they were separated, but it's joined as an omnibus bill, which really includes a poison pill. You can't vote for the stuff that you would like to see without also voting for stuff that you just find completely unacceptable. So it's with regret that I have to indicate to the House that I'll be unable to support this bill, and I urge members of the Assembly to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, section 29(2)(a) is available.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I noticed he didn't choose to make any comments about unions and their current inclusion in donations to parties. Would he like to make any comments about how he would like to see the role of unions in elections?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have been even-handed in our approach all along.

An Hon. Member: All along? When?

Mr. Mason: Well, when we originally took this position a number of years ago – I think it was after the 2001 election – we adopted the position of eliminating both union and corporate donations, treating them together, and I think that that's an even-handed and fair approach. I don't support the suggestions that have been made by some members in the House that unions themselves have no business getting involved in political activity, but I do think their role in giving campaign contributions needs to be eliminated along with corporations'.

I think unions have very clear interests, their members as a whole, and they have a right to be politically active, to take positions that are democratically arrived at by their membership. Those that would try to limit that I think are on pretty dangerous ground. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You would have to see, in my view, similar restrictions placed on corporate political involvement. They're not the same thing. The

financing of elections is a part but only a part of a broader involvement in politics, which I think we curtail at great risk to the rights of working people and to the rights of freedom of speech.

The Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

If not, let me recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak in third reading to this important bill, that I think all Albertans were anticipating with some eagerness, especially those who have any involvement in political activity. I think this was going to be – and I think it will be – the cornerstone of how people evaluate the credibility of this government. They had an opportunity. They recognized over the last few years that as a government of some 40 years some rot had crept into the political system, and they wanted to address it. Under this new Premier they made a commitment to look at issues around financing and limits and accountability with, well, I think the only word is "scandals" that have been plaguing this government for a number of years around how money is influencing political decisions and buying access.

There was, I think, a genuine attempt in bringing this bill forward to address some of these concerns. Like others in the opposition, I think we're profoundly disappointed that the two elephants in the room, the amount of donations and the fact that unions and corporations can still dominate the whole electoral process with their deep pockets, still rankle and, I think, are not going to be lost on Albertans, who will look at the terms of this and see no essential change in the big, big influences, the big, as I call them, elephants in the room that have not been addressed with any change. We still, Mr. Speaker, in 2012 have to acknowledge that we are the best democracy money can buy.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Dr. Swann: I heard affirmation from the other side.

I want to talk just a bit about the concept of wilful blindness, Mr. Speaker. Wilful blindness is a medical condition wherein an individual organization seeks to avoid liability for a crime or a civil irregularity by making themselves deliberately unaware of facts which could make them liable either in the public civil courts or in the criminal courts. That's based on a definition that is online.

Wilful blindness, of course, protects people in situations where people make deliberate attempts to excuse themselves from liability.

5:00

What we've seen in this session and in this government is a profound case of wilful blindness, I would say. They do not want to see what is clearly evident to all Albertans and certainly to those in the opposition parties, who see a government that continues to do the same things over and over again and is surprised when not only the opposition parties but the media, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, begin to show the rot that has infested this government and its decision-making, a government that is consistently and more obviously every day showing how money does influence decisions, how it favours certain interests over others, and how it fails to provide for the long-term interests of Albertans, whether it's in social supports, early intervention for children, mental health care, or whether it relates to labour issues and farm workers, as has been mentioned, ignoring some of the gross inequities and lack of accountability that has crept into this government.

They refuse to see it. Quite consistently we've seen in this session and on this bill, the Election Accountability Amendment

Act, a refusal to acknowledge any good in any of the amendments, over 100 amendments, brought forward within a week of our having seen this bill for the first time. As has been said, there was no genuine effort on the part of this government to make us aware of what was going to be in the bill and what kinds of changes they were looking at.

It speaks for itself. I think Albertans, unfortunately many, will be so discouraged by the lack of progress in the whole electoral financing issue and the accountability issue that they will simply pull away further from the democratic process. We had the lowest turnout in history in 2008, and we had only a slight improvement in our voter turnout this past election, I think in part because people are so cynical about the way corporations and money continue to influence and provide advantage to incumbents and particularly this government of 42 years.

The decisions made in this bill have reinforced widespread cynicism about not only the electoral process but us as politicians, that we're looking out for our own interests, for party interests over better public policy and longer term decisions on behalf of the public. Why should people believe in democracy when it continues to be subverted by this 42-year party with the agenda, primarily, of getting re-elected? It has demonstrated a lack of accountability on revelations of illegal donations, conflicts of interest, flip-flops on openness and accountability, and decisions made before and after the elections. With a government that's still committed to having its own MLAs set our salaries and benefits, what does that say to a populace that is in many cases struggling with a very high cost of living and a median salary that is well below anything that we see in the House?

The two elephants in the room, as I indicated, Mr. Speaker, are the practice of allowing alarmingly high donation limits, \$30,000 in an election year and \$15,000 in a nonelection year. Huge influence. I spent little more than \$30,000 in my election; I can't imagine getting one cheque of \$30,000 from a corporation. The second elephant in the room, of course, is allowing corporations, who do not have a vote, to have inordinate influence. Up to two-thirds of the donations across the way in this government are corporate, and it, again, speaks to the power of the corporations that they're unwilling to make the changes that Albertans are asking them to make. I mean, it's so blatant. Well, wilful blindness, I guess, is the only term.

As a physician I know it's difficult for people with a condition to do anything about it, but one would expect educated individuals who have a commitment to the office to look seriously at those two elephants in the room and acknowledge that their whole ethos is undermined. Their whole ability to govern, their ability to have credibility not only as leaders in public policy but in their own constituencies are being undermined by the complete failure to address these two major issues.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I among all of the opposition parties, I now gather, will be voting against this and making it very public that this government has once again abandoned its responsibility not only to better public policy, which this electoral act had an opportunity to do, but to democracy and the opportunity to really bring us to the level of most other countries and most other provinces in this country, which have set serious limits and acknowledged that, actually, money does talk. Albertans know that.

We missed a real opportunity here as a Legislature to bring more people into the democratic process, including our children and those who have for many different reasons become disengaged from the political process, to all of our loss. When people are not engaged, we don't have the best of ideas. We don't have communities working together on issues. We just have a sense that

the powerless or the haves and the have-nots continue to separate themselves because they feel, especially at the bottom, the 99 per cent, that there's no point, that the power has been concentrated so heavily for so long that there's no point in being engaged at all. It is very dangerous both socially and politically to have that kind of ethos that we're now living with.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one, I'll recognize, then, the next main speaker, which will be the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with somewhat mixed feelings. I'm not going to support this bill, and I'm going to explain why. There are good parts to the bill that I would be supportive of – and I'm happy that they are in the bill – particularly the four-year civic election, the fixed election date for municipal elections. That's not to say that that's not problematic in some cases. There are people who have some concerns about a four-year term, and I'm going to make the presumption that they were weighed. I'm still supportive of four-year terms for the municipalities.

I'm not supportive of the bill as a whole because I do not agree with the hon. minister that it does what they said that it was supposed to do. The hon. minister will stand up in the end and say how this increases transparency, and I just don't see that. I cannot measure that in this bill. The transparency that we have will remain for the most part. Quarterly reporting won't increase transparency. It will just show it in a different time frame. It's not going to prevent what I would call the loopholes that currently exist.

I will give one example of that, and I think it's a significant example. There were some situations that were troublesome to me. I know things can get contentious across the aisle, and lots of people are guilty at different points, which requires the Speaker or the chair to stand up and bring us back into order. I will tell you this. To claim that every amendment that we brought forward was somehow less than standard – I won't use some of the words that were used – that in itself I just fundamentally disagree with. To believe that 67 members on a statistical basis would agree unanimously on all those amendments – and there were 100-plus amendments brought forward – well, I would like to have those odds when I play the lottery, to tell you the truth. It's not believable.

So there had to be some amendments. I know there are valid arguments against some of the amendments we brought, that they did not want to support those, and I can understand that, but there were other amendments where there was no real good argument why the amendment should not have been accepted, because it would have strengthened the bill. That was the whole purpose of bringing those amendments, for no other reason than to try to strengthen the bill and make it work.

I'll tell you where the hon. members lost me and lost me significantly in this debate. It was when a member tried to convince me that permissive language was somehow prescriptive language. I could not believe that a judge looking at this legislation would make that same determination. We would have to go back to the debate and debate whether or not "may" was permissive or prescriptive, and I just would disagree with that.

5:10

I think what happened with this bill is that it came forward with the best of intentions. I believe that. When I speak to the individ-

uals involved, I think they had the best of intentions in submitting this bill. I just think it never got to the level that they had hoped it would get to. The bar was not raised. What we did – and I think it is really problematic – is that we are not going to basically look at some of these offences that were made public that caused the public itself to lose confidence in the system or to be cynical about our system.

We did FOIP a number of towns. I found that out when I investigated. They even FOIPed my own town, which actually was before the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. The town of Rimbey had contributed to the PC Party – and this we found out a couple of years ago – and not all that money has been paid back. I know this because I spoke with the town after I found out they got FOIPed recently. But that's not the issue here. The issue here is that they need to be held responsible. All these communities need to be held responsible.

I think that when it's pointed out to them, they are responsible in many ways. I just want to point that out because this is where this bill does not go the distance and prevent this. When I asked one of the former councillors about this contribution that was expensed to the town – it was a political contribution – his first response was: but we've always done it that way. He was sort of confused that we would even raise the question.

They didn't see a problem with using taxpayers' dollars to fund a political party. They didn't do it out of malice. They didn't do it because they knew they were breaking the rules or regulations. They just thought that that's the way it was done. That's incomprehensible today, but that was the way they thought when they were first asked about this. I would say there are still some councillors out there that have not gotten the message, but we don't know where that's at, and of course the party never will have responsibility in the sense that this act does not hold the party responsible.

In my view, it's just sort of a benign bill. It tried, but it didn't succeed, and for that reason I will not vote for it.

I want to talk about the decorum here in the Assembly in dealing with some of these issues. We took a lot of criticism a little bit earlier – and we'll take it again in the closing – about some of the amendments we brought forward. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the process is simple. A motion is made, the amendment is then brought forward, and we have to wait until the amendment is passed out to the Assembly. When I see a member from across the way take the amendment, before even reading it, rip it up or crumple it up, and throw it away, I will tell you that that sends a clear message on what the level of decorum is. That, to me, is fundamentally wrong.

I think that regardless of whether you support the amendment or even want to oppose the amendment, out of respect for the people you represent, you should at least read the amendment and make an argument one way or the other rather than send that type of message. I really believe that. Again, they are the party in power. They are the government. They set the level. They set the standard.

I'm going to finish with one of the issues that is really paramount in my objection to the bill. It is corporate influence. I was very supportive of that measure when it came forward. Now, I brought forward a number of arguments in a different venue. It was interesting because they got misinterpreted as if I were antibusiness. But I will tell you this. As president and CEO of a company I donated on a corporate level because I was allowed to by law. We did donate for the whole purpose of making sure that we supported the candidates or the party that best represented the business that we were in. We wanted to do that, and that's what we did. I have run and operated small businesses, and I've worked

for large corporations, so to accuse me of being antibusiness would be a false and misguided application.

I will tell you this. On the corporate influence side we seem to be stuck or focused on just the donations, but there are so many loopholes that have gone unplugged here. They should have been addressed, and I would have liked to have seen them addressed.

I'm going to use a corporation that is a prime example of that, and that's the corporation AltaLink. AltaLink is incorporated in this province. It is a partnership. I've formed many partnerships, and I know why individuals do it. I know why corporate entities form partnerships. AltaLink is owned by a company called SNC-Lavalin, who has been investigated for money laundering. They have been investigated for bribery. They are currently under investigation on these charges. They have had one CEO convicted of fraud. The former CEO here in Canada has just been arrested most recently and charged with fraud. Here is a company that has a no-bid contract that is worth approximately \$5 billion.

How does that relate to this bill? I'm going to explain that. The executive vice-president of this corporate entity was lobbying on behalf of this company because he was a registered lobbyist under the act legally. They were lobbying for a transmission line for which there is actually no evidence that it is needed, not on a technical level. How did they get this? How did they get a multibillion-dollar contract when there's no bidding process, no proper vetting process? The instruments, the documents this government relies upon, have been refuted by the people who drafted them. That is significant in many ways, and nobody is asking these questions.

Now, this company has all sorts of avenues at its disposal to influence the process. They get to spend money on advertising, which most companies have to expense. But when AltaLink spends money and you hear them on the radio, they earn over 9 per cent return on the amount of money they spend. So if they spend their political donations correctly and capitalize on that, not only are they spending money, but they're earning a rate of return on that. The fact is that that comes back to this influence on the election process.

The hon. member said earlier, even during question period, that all of this has taken place without public money, that this is private investment dealing with electricity, but that's not true with AltaLink or with any other transmission line companies. When they spend money, they charge it back to the ratepaying public and everyone here in this Assembly, and then they also get to earn a rate of interest on that money, a rate of return. They get paid, they earn money by trying to influence the political process. That hasn't been covered in this bill. That's just not there.

I want to close with just one item here because it is significant. We're not questioning now the facts of the matter. What we are doing is that we're accepting comments that are unsubstantiated. We're doing this in every avenue that I can see now, whether you go to the Tobaccogate issue or whether you deal with the transmission lines or whether you deal with corporate influence on the political process.

I will tell you this. The hon. Minister of Energy stood up when one of the members asked about the cost of a transmission line, what it would cost on your bill. He basically said – and it's in the *Hansard* on, I believe, October 31 – that it will cost about 60 cents on every individual's bill. But the AESO now has come out publicly and said that those costs are going to rise 400 per cent. I challenge any member in here to check the facts. Go home and pull out your electric bills. Look at the cost of transmission and ask yourself: is 400 per cent equal to 60 cents? I'll guarantee you that it probably will not be. We need to deal with facts. We need to deal with substance. On this bill, when we brought forward

these amendments, we brought forward examples of how this could be improved, and we were denied at every turn. That just does not cut the mustard as far as I'm concerned.

5:20

Again, we are dealing with a company that has a significantly bad reputation now, who has a no-bid, multibillion-contract with this province. Its executive vice-president was the vice-president of the PC Party, who, by the way, is a nice man, in general. I like him. But he was an executive vice-president of the PC Party for no other reason, in my view, than to enhance exactly what he was supposed to be doing. He was getting paid to be there to do one thing. That is something that we need to look at as far as the conflict of interest.

We need to look at how these companies can usurp the current laws to influence the process. Even though I will play by whatever rules this party in power sets, I am of the view that business is a good thing, that corporations are a good thing when you're dealing in business for getting capital for investment purposes, but I will tell you that in the political process they have a tremendous record of doing a lot of detrimental damage to the confidence and to the integrity of the democratic process.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one under 29(2)(a), let us move on to the next main speaker. Our rotation would show, I guess, that the next member will be Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't made up my mind, I should say, I guess, on whether I'm supporting or not supporting this bill. There are, as the hon. leader of the Liberals said, some good points and there are some bad points, and we saw that with Bill 2 also. You know, there were some very good parts of that bill, and there were some very bad parts of that bill.

I think that as with the other bills that we've seen go through this House in the past, we come back in the future to amend them, so I'm guessing that's what's going to happen with Bill 2 and this bill and Bill 4. You know, we're going to try them out for a while, and after the outrage of the Alberta people we'll be back in here fixing them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In this bill some of the negative points that I see are on the banning of the corporate donations. As the other members have stated, you know, it's the perception. We don't know what goes on on the other side of the House in their party meetings about what they do with the money and how much influence that money has on the party. The perception is not good. It leads to being persuaded by those companies that donate such large amounts of money. You know, there are lots of examples all over the world, in the U.S. with the Congressmen. I mean, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars donated, and I'm sure that there are many phone calls made after hours that say: "Hey, remember that donation? If you want more money, well, you'd better vote this way or that way."

Also, another point is the illegal donations that are to be repaid. Now, we all know that people make mistakes. I've had this conversation with some of the members on the other side of the House, you know, talking about this. If we have fundraisers, different events going on, the volunteers that are taking these donations in for us may not realize that they're illegal. Fine. We can't be everywhere. I think that it is our job and the party's job to ensure that we minimize that to the maximum so that this doesn't

happen, but if that mistake happens, then it should be paid back. If those donations are not paid back and we know that they're illegal, well, then that should be public knowledge.

That goes to the whole perception, again, of our parties and of us as representatives. If it's, you know, not made public and you don't repay that money, then it's hidden. We talk about transparency and accountability. This is a way to show that we're transparent and accountable to the people that make these donations and who support us to get where we are. We all know that it takes a lot of help and a lot of work and a lot of money to get us to where we're at today. If we can minimize the negative feelings that are out there towards politicians and actually practise what we preach about being more accountable and transparent, I think it'll go a long way to help our image.

You know, it says that the Chief Electoral Officer may release details of investigations in the last three years. Well, that should be a must. I mean, what have we got to hide? If we've got nothing to hide, put it out there. If we're being open and transparent, then he should be able to produce those records, make it public.

Going a little bit deeper into the bill, where we talk about the CAs and reporting quarterly, there are many CAs that don't have a whole host of volunteers to choose from, and this just puts a lot more work on them. I can see, you know, that during the election campaign people worked very, very hard to get us here. Again, if we are doing the proper reporting yearly, if we're not taking illegal donations – if mistakes were made, if we're making those payments back, if there was something that happened and we made an illegal donation or received one through volunteers or whatever process, that should be paid back. Those statements can be found in your annual reports.

Another one is with the municipal elections. There should be no reason why the members that lose the election don't have to give that money to a charity. Why should they be able to pocket that money? Who knows what they'd do with it? Those monies were made from the public. They should be put back into the public, not into the pocket of the person who was not so successful. There's no reason why they should be able to keep that money.

You know, I do believe that the penalties should be raised. For many of these corporations, if they continue to be allowed to donate, a \$10,000 fine – it costs some of them that much to wake up in the morning. There are many private citizens that are millionaires and billionaires that can donate. You know, \$10,000 to them is nothing. We need to make those fines substantial so that maybe they will think before these donations are made.

In going through this process the last few weeks – and one of the other members mentioned about taking baby steps – I think a lot of this process that we go through is steps, as we saw with the other bills that we had to come back and amend. I think this is going to be another step that we take to improve the positive aspects of this bill. Those points will be well received in the public, the negative ones not so much. This, I think, will be a first step in making some progress. We'll have to continue on and make some more adjustments as we go, which I think we'll be doing in many of the steps.

As the hon. Member for Airdrie said, I wish I had – I was asking around for a box of Smarties to hand out some Smarties because, you know, I think there are some good points in this bill. There are many good people over there, and they have good intentions.

There are some good things with this bill, on the students. I had students from my area that were going to school, to university, and it was a real hassle for them because that's where they were living, where they were getting their mail, but it wasn't their hometown. They went to vote, and they were turned down. They couldn't

vote. I think it's good because many of those students are there for, you know, two, three, four, five years. They make those cities their home, and they should be able to vote where they're at.

This bill does address most of the concerns of the Chief Electoral Officer. He's the one in charge of this elections process, so hopefully he's happy with the input that he's had into this bill. From what I've heard and what I've read, they've taken into account most of them.

Mr. McAllister: I think I'm leaning toward not supporting this.
5:30

Mr. Hale: I'm not done yet.

You know, I do have some friends and some supporters that were not physically able to go into the polling stations. I don't see anything wrong if the elections officers that are at those ballot stations, if a person cannot make it in – my father was in a wheelchair for 40 years. There were many times that he couldn't get down the street or get out of the van because there was too much snow. We always joked that we had to make a set of chains for the wheelchair so he could get through some of those adverse positions. We never did get around to that. It was only two-wheel drive, so he was bugged anyway.

Mrs. Forsyth: You can't say that.

Mr. Hale: Well, he was.

You know, there are some instances where I think there should be some leeway. They could take the ballot box out to the vehicle – we have scrutineers that can go with them – and allow them to vote. They've paid taxes, they've lived here all their lives, they've helped make this province the great place it is, and they should be able to vote. [interjections] That's exactly right.

I think with a lot of these bills, you know, we're so adamant that they have to be perfect. We all know that it's not perfect. We all know the amendments that we put forward would have gone a long way to make them a little more perfect. A good friend of mine years ago said that when you run into problems – it was his advice to me – walk slow and drink lots of water.

I think we're going to continue to work with the government, and hopefully the government can continue to see our worth over here and maybe realize that some of these amendments that we're putting forward are substantial. It'll save us a lot of time and energy coming back year after year and making amendments.

On that, I think I'll let my colleagues get up and speak, and I'll continue to listen and make my decision as we carry on. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for allowing me to jump the queue. Not the queue that's in the newspapers right now, but our own personal one.

I am disappointed that the Local Authorities Election Act is included in Bill 7. As the Municipal Affairs critic I would have preferred to have had two separate bills to deal with. So that's left me in a bit of a quandary. I will be supporting Bill 7, and I will support it because it addresses the issues that have been brought forward by municipalities. But I want to make it very, very clear that I'm certainly not pleased with the accountability sections of the bill or, rather, I should say, the nonaccountability sections of the bill.

I'm left in a quandary here. I feel that I have to support it simply because it does do for municipalities what they've been after for a long time. I will probably differ with my colleagues, and I'm proud to be able to say that I can do that.

I will close with that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak on third reading of Bill 7. This legislation was presented as, you know, groundbreaking. It was going to change the world.

An Hon. Member: So was Bill 4.

Mr. Hale: That was Bill 2.

Mr. Wilson: That, too. As was Bill 4, as was Bill 2, Bill 7 was another unfortunate disappointment in the long list of government bills that we saw in this session.

From the start we saw deficiencies in it. Although 90 of 101 recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer were included in this bill, there were a number of recommendations that were not. It's very unfortunate that the Justice minister decided to leave out the recommendation for fixed election dates. I think that that could have really levelled the playing field for all parties when we move into election season in this province and could have taken away the unfair advantage that the governing party has by knowing exactly when that date is and being able to have their campaign in readiness, fully prepared and ready to go, and then opposition parties are just waiting for the drop of the writ. It is an advantage. It's unfortunate that you decided to keep it, but I guess it shouldn't really come as that much of a surprise.

You know, we're also severely disappointed that they decided to keep a three-year time limit on the release of the information. The Chief Electoral Officer made no recommendations around time, yet the government imposed this, again, probably as a self-preservation tool.

There were areas of concern that we were in contact with His Worship Mayor Nenshi in Calgary on, where he brought a number of recommendations in areas where he thought there could be progress. But again this government decided that they knew better than those who were actually running these types of municipal elections on the ground and doing what could be best. They again shut down another amendment.

This one miraculously – it boggles the mind as to how something like this is even written in the law, where all candidates who are in a municipal election who do not win cannot keep a campaign surplus, or if they choose not to run, even though they've been fundraising as a registered candidate, are not mandated by law to do something with that money. I think that the government missed a giant opportunity to add and change about four words in one part of this act. You've left that hole open, so pat yourselves on the back.

Concepts that the Minister of Justice added with absolutely no input from the Chief Electoral Officer again can only be interpreted as perhaps malicious.

The idea of having CAs report quarterly to the Chief Electoral Officer is going to damage every single one of us. The reality is that there are two reasons. One is that our CAs are run by volunteers. We're now asking them every three months to file a

disclosure statement with the Chief Electoral Officer. On the back end of that, we've now got a Chief Electoral Officer who – and I sit on the Legislative Offices Committee – is going to come back to us, and he's going to require more staff, more money, more pension, more benefits. All for what? For nothing. To have CAs come back and report quarterly. It doesn't make any sense. There's no logical justification. The government can stand up and say that it's all about disclosure and that we're the party that's been asking for disclosure, but at the end of the day it's burdensome, it's onerous red tape for volunteers, and it adds needless expense for the Chief Electoral Officer.

That being said, there were some positives in this bill, and I do want to give credit where credit is due. Increased access for postsecondary students to vote during an election campaign: definitely a positive step in the right direction. Adding enumeration in tax assessments provincially, hopefully, will start to clear up some of those voters lists and get rid of, you know, 17 families living at one address.

I think that there's room for appreciating some of the things that the government chose to put in this bill as well. Four-year terms for municipal elections: again, a positive step in the right direction. Allowing for the disclosure of illegal contributions: it was something the Chief Electoral Officer asked for; it's something that was put in the bill. Yes, we were upset with the time frame that was imposed, but again a step in the right direction.

Now, this party here and the parties next to us put forward many, many responsible amendments to this legislation. Unfortunately, as has been said much today, 24 in total; not one accepted. Banning corporate donations: still allowed. Closing the Katz loophole: no, don't want it. Reducing the maximum donation limits: why would we need to do that? Making action on violations mandatory for the Chief Electoral Officer: not an option; who needs it? Extending the time limit for punishing and publicizing illegal donations: three years is good; it'll cover us. Correcting what must be an oversight in ensuring candidates in municipal elections donate surpluses to charity, not just successful candidates: kind of covered that one. You know, again, it doesn't make a lot of sense.

A lot has been said today and in the last couple of days about the issue of respect on what's happening in this House and with the hundred or more amendments that the opposition put forward. I just thought I'd offer my two cents here. The reality is that I've been told by members opposite that, you know, maybe if we were talking about policy issues and not issues of accountability and if we weren't focusing on issues that Albertans are asking us to focus on and maybe focused on issues that the government wanted us to focus on, they'd look at our amendments with a bit of a different lens and perhaps some of them would actually pass. Yet we also have members standing up and saying: "I'm here to do what's best for all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. I'm here to represent the interests of everybody. But I'm going to be vindictive when it comes to amendments regardless of if it makes policy better, regardless of if it makes the legislation better. I'm not going to do it because the opposition is mean."

5:40

It boggles my mind. You know, what are we supposed to do? Do we stand up and ask the same puffball questions as some of your backbenchers, with the exception of Calgary-North West, who seems to be able to knock them out of the park? Is that what the government wants us to do? That is now going to allow us to strengthen the legislation? I highly doubt it.

Actions are louder than words. If you truly want to run an accountable, open, transparent government, that option is all yours. You are the majority. You have 61 seats. It's on you.

Despite the many shortcomings, the many holes left unplugged in this legislation, the fact that no input was taken for the opposition or the mayor of Calgary and that the government has again demonstrated that its version of democracy is better than anybody else's, my litmus test for support of this bill is: are we better off before this legislation or after? I'm going to hold my nose on this one, and I'm going to support it because I do believe that Albertans in general are better after this bill than we were before.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. member if he ever considered a different litmus test. When I was considering supporting this bill – and I am not supporting this bill – I read time and time again how Alberta has Canada's weakest election laws. We've also heard time and time again how although the opposition offered many, many good amendments to make it stronger, they were totally disregarded, without consideration it appears.

I'm wondering if you considered that the government did have a higher duty of care, could have done better, should have done better, especially with something as important as elections, where it's the government's job to make things fair, equitable, and run as well as possible. Never mind the illegal donations. Never mind not closing the Katz loopholes. The quarterly reporting I know is going to be a huge problem in Cypress-Medicine Hat.

I'm just wondering if you think that your support of this bill may lead the government to not doing their best job in the future.

Mr. Wilson: That is a good question. I would like to thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for it. I do not believe that supporting this bill will impact it. Whether I support this bill or not, they're going to do what they do. I think we've seen that in this session, that it really doesn't matter what we say over here or what we do.

At the end of the day I'm going to support this bill because, as I said, I do believe that we or Albertans or the constituents that put me here are going to be better off, that they're going to have a better run system after this legislation than they did before. That's my test, and that will be why I support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on 29(2)(a)?

Are there other speakers? I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up – I think I'm pleased, but I'm not really sure if I'm pleased – on Bill 7, the Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012, in third reading. I, like some of my other colleagues, am struggling on whether or not to support this bill. I guess the one thing that I like about being a member of the opposition and that I particularly like about being with the Wildrose even more is the leader from Highwood, who truly, truly believes in free votes.

We've discussed this, why you'd be supporting and why you wouldn't be supporting. I, like my colleague from Calgary-Shaw, look at the bill and say: well, when we started here we had nothing. Now we've got probably an 84-page bill. That's something, but it's not great. You know, it's one of those situations

where you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't, situations that make it very difficult for some politicians. And I say that with all honesty.

I guess what's troublesome for me is the 24 amendments that were brought forward in this Legislature to strengthen this bill. You know, I keep going back and back and back to when the Premier was running and she talked about her democratic renewal strategy in May. She was talking about whistle-blower legislation and how she was going to make it the best in Canada and all of that. We all know – and the member from Fort McMurray who carried the bill still to this day stands up and says what a wonderful piece of legislation it is, knowing that every other person across this country has said that it's the worst bill in Canada. So we have this Bill 7, this Election Accountability Amendment Act.

Government has been right on with some of the things that they brought forward, you know. They've talked about making it easier and more accessible for young kids. Well, nobody is going to argue that. I mean, we all think it's important that our youth start getting involved and become more accountable, and we want them to get out and vote because, quite frankly, they're our future. It's something that's been a challenge for myself, how we start engaging youth. I think we've kind of figured that out. We've got a good strategy that we're going to move forward on and start getting more youth involved.

But, gee whillikers, Mr. Speaker, you look at what happened with Katz. You look at banning the corporations. I was with the leader when she got scrummed today and was asked: were we not going to take corporate sponsors? Her answer was perfect.

I always live by this slogan, and I've lived by it all my life. People will see me driving around in my little RAV that's got a little pig on it. That pig is there as a reminder because it's a saying that I love: you don't get off the horse to fight the pigs. It's very tough in this Legislature to stay on that horse. The leader has reminded me, hence, why I have a horse in my office and the pig on the car. It continually reminds me of the horse-and-pig story.

I guess for me it's going to really come down to the vote. I was listening through all this debate, and I was hoping that the Member for Calgary-Hays would get up, someone who was formerly a counsellor and, obviously, ran for mayor. I was expecting him, quite frankly, to get up and speak in regard to the money left over from his mayoral campaign. What he did with that, we still haven't heard. It's a good amendment. There's nothing wrong with an amendment like that. Donate the darn money to charity. Do whatever you can, but at least on behalf of your constituents stand up. I'll still ask the Member for Calgary-Hays, once we start getting out, in regard to: what did you do with your money? I know the money that I had left over from Calgary-Fish Creek from the last election – and I haven't run in a municipal election – I returned back to the constituency. If I get on my horse four years down the road, it will stay there. It will stay there either for the next candidate to get some money to go on, you know, or I will donate it to charity.

There are so many questions with even fewer answers. I have to tell you that I'm struggling. I'm hoping that a couple more of my colleagues will get up and speak so I can come to a conclusion on this bill and, when the bells ring, I'll be able to have a decision on behalf of my constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 7, the Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012. I believe this

bill was a good first step. It was reassuring to see the government put importance on changing the perception of the electoral system and to show that this is a priority. As a new MLA to the House I was moved by this. I looked forward to being part of the process, to having input, and to ensuring that those Albertans whom I represent had a voice at the table. Sadly, that wasn't so. This government brought forward a bill in a manner and at a pace that prevented collaboration, consultation with Albertans, and restricted input.

This government consistently released legislation claiming to be world leaders, but in practice they brought in an act that is embarrassing compared to other jurisdictions. I wish this didn't apply to Bill 7, but it clearly does. There are really only two main reasons – my colleagues have already gone over most of them – why I cannot support this bill, and they're pretty clear.

5:50

To disagree with an amendment that bans corporate donations, to me, is clearly disturbing. The hon. Member for Airdrie gave a clear indication about how, yes, we accept corporate donations, and we've seen the light, as the other two parties have as well, as to why and how they can influence the electoral system. By allowing corporations to make campaign donations, we run the risk of allowing individuals who control these organizations to be granted more rights than Albertans. Elections must be transparent and fair if they are to have the support of the electorate. When corporate donations are allowed, it gives the impression that candidates can be bought by wealthy interests. It's not enough to say that elections should be fair. They must also appear to be fair to all Albertans.

Alberta should be a leader in electoral reform. We could have raised the bar and created momentum for similar changes in all other jurisdictions in Canada. We could have made this a national standard. Mr. Speaker, we're seeing all across this world citizens rising up. They're fighting in the streets, and they're dying for the democratic right to vote. People are literally asking, begging, and dying for open, fair, and transparent elections. We had that opportunity here in this House. Elections should be focused on citizens and be in the best interests of citizens. Corporations are not citizens. They do not have the right to vote or hold office and should not be financing candidates' campaigns.

Alberta is seeing decreased voter turnout. Public cynicism about politics is growing. This government had an opportunity to go a long way to reverse this trend and assure Albertans that government has not been bought and paid for. Candidates should be financed by the constituents they represent. If citizens believe that they've done a good job, those candidates will be able to raise adequate funds. If they've done a poor job, then they should have and will have more difficulty raising funds for possible re-election. Large donations from businesses and other organizations with significant financial resources can have an undue influence on who decides to run and who gets elected.

The second and more important reason is the inability of this government to see the light and make all illegal donations public. Period. This defect in Bill 7 is the lack of public accountability that this government has so clearly said they want. The refusal to amend the act to ensure that all illegal donations are made public is disturbing. The fact that this government has made a conscious choice to ensure that those who have made public donations will never be held to account is reprehensible. For this government to tell Albertans that the Premier's sister will never have to account for or pay back taxpayer money for making political donations while being an AHS employee is terrible – this does refer to the act, sir – or that the Wood Buffalo housing corporation will not

have to pay back a \$2,500 donation to the PC Party, using funds that were meant to help the most needy looking for affordable housing.

The real tragedy in this is that there is still a belief that not disclosing illegal donations of any party somehow benefits Albertans and is open and transparent. That's tragic. The lack of concern that taxpayer dollars from municipalities, government agencies, housing corporations, and public institutions are making donations to the PC Party and that this is acceptable is disturbing. The role of legislators is to provide openness and transparency and ensure that Albertans can have faith in a system that is meant to protect democracy. Rather than ensure a fair and transparent and accountable elections amendment act, this government is telling Albertans: "Don't worry about the past. Only look into the future." However, illegal is illegal, and as legislators we are bound by Albertans to do the right thing even when it has a negative effect on a personal or party position.

The amendments from the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Anne provided clarity and transparency to Albertans, which should be our main goal, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McAllister: St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mrs. Towle: Sorry. Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I apologize.

In closing, I just have a few quick comments. The last time I checked, the role of the opposition was to be a check and balance. The last time I checked, the role of the government was to ensure co-operation with all parties. The last time I checked, the government voted against over 105 amendments put forward by all opposition parties. The last time I checked, legislative bills should be in the best interests of all Albertans. The last time I checked, Bill 7 was supposed to ensure openness and transparency. The last time I checked, Bill 7 was supposed to be the best, most comprehensive bill in Canada. The last time I checked, corporate donations resulted in Bill 50, which was devastating to landowners. The last time I checked, illegal was illegal. The last time I checked, those who do illegal acts should be held accountable. The last time I checked, this government was clearly covering their behinds.

For those reasons, I will not support Bill 7.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it would be appropriate at this time to ask for unanimous consent to shorten the bells in the event of a division?

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the Government House Leader, that requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader to close the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Forsyth	Lemke
Bhardwaj	Fraser	McIver
Brown	Griffiths	Oberle
Calahasen	Hale	Olesen
Campbell	Hancock	Pastoor
Cao	Horne	Quest
Casey	Horner	Rodney
Cusanelli	Jansen	Rowe
Donovan	Jeneroux	Sandhu
Dorward	Johnson, J.	Scott
Fawcett	Klimchuk	Wilson
Fenske	Kubinec	Woo-Paw

6:00

Against the motion:

Anderson	McAllister	Smith
Anglin	Notley	Stier
Barnes	Pedersen	Strankman
Bikman	Saskiw	Swann
Fox	Sherman	Towle

Totals: For – 36 Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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