



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

Issue 30

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, welcome back.

Let us pray. Dear Lord and Great Creator, as we begin the third sitting of the First Session of the 28th Legislature, we ask for guidance in fulfilling our duties for the enduring benefit of all Albertans. As Members of this Legislative Assembly let us also be reminded that we have all pledged to faithfully serve the citizens we humbly represent. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem led by M. Paul Lorieau.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members, and thank you, M. Lorieau. Welcome back. It's nice to have you with us. [applause]
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back.

I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of young students and teachers from the George P. Nicholson school, located in the constituency of Edmonton-South West, that I'm so honoured to serve. Accompanying these 20 bright and energetic students is their teacher, Mrs. Marcie Syme, and parent Ms Michele Saul. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that the students and guests from George P. Nicholson please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly teacher Ms Amy Antony and 22 of her best and brightest students from Madonna Catholic school in Sherwood Park. I am pleased that they are able to be here today to take part in activities that will help them learn more about the workings of our government. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to be back.

It is my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 51 fine and very energetic students from Meyonohk elementary school. Meyonohk is a Cree word meaning a nice place to be. I think it's the right spot in

Alberta right now to appreciate our democracy. They're visiting our Assembly today accompanied by teacher Deb Sitter. Now I would request them to please rise and receive our warm traditional welcome.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to be back.

I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members a group of elementary school students visiting from my constituency. The 17 grade 6 students from Spruce View school are sitting in the gallery along with their teacher, Carmen Abraham; vice-principal, Glen Brooke; and parent volunteers Bobby-Jo Stannard and Kim McKain. I hope they enjoy their time at the Legislature. I'll ask them to please stand as my hon. colleagues provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special people and exceptionally talented artists that you had the opportunity to host earlier this morning. I'd ask each of them to stand up as I introduce them. First of all, Jeff de Boer is an artist and sculptor from Calgary. He is also a board member at the In-Definite Arts Society, which supports arts and people that are working with artists with developmental disabilities.

Megan Gilmore is from Calgary as well and is a contributing artist representing the In-Definite Arts Society. Brad McCaull is also from Calgary and is a contributing artist from the In-Definite Arts Society. Tony Goodison is from Calgary and is a contributing artist as well; of course, as we heard earlier, he took his first plane ride today to come up here. Monique Morley is also a contributing artist. Johnny Davenport is also from Calgary and a contributing artist. As well, Alyssa Hatton is here with her parents. Alyssa is from Chestermere and is a contributing artist. Of course, there are also many people in the gallery from the Edmonton and Calgary PDD community.

Mr. Speaker, you'll know that under Mr. de Boer's guidance we had the opportunity today to take a look at the collective work of *A Meaningful Life*, which is a collection of work by 24 artists that are living with developmental disabilities. It's a showcase of everything that is truly wonderful about Alberta and about making a commitment to our lives and to our community. I'd like everyone to give this wonderful group of people in both galleries, yours and the members', a warm welcome to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you well know, this is National Social Work Week, and I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven registered social workers from the Ministry of Human Services and from the Alberta College of Social Workers. Every day social workers contribute to the health and well-being of Albertans, often in challenging circumstances. Their efforts deserve recognition because we all benefit from the many positive outcomes of their work when we see people in our communities doing well and overcoming difficulties in their lives. In addition to four employees from Human Services, we have here today three representatives from the Alberta College of Social Workers. The college is a valuable partner in developing and supporting a skilled workforce and strong leadership within the social work field.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the following people to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House: Sabrina McConnell, a child intervention specialist from Grande Prairie; Shirley Cunningham, a caseworker from Jossard, with the Lesser Slave Lake regional council; John Dunn, strategic initiatives and child care specialist from Edmonton, serving the Métis settlements; Pauline Hunter, a caseworker from AKO Child and Family Services in the Montana First Nation, Hobbema. Representing the Alberta College of Social Workers: Valerie Kinjerski from St. Albert, Charity Lui from Edmonton, and Lori Sigurdson from Edmonton. I'd ask you all to give these wonderful workers for humans in Alberta a warm traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

1:40

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a dedicated group of nursing students from Medicine Hat College. This group of bright young students has been working hard to promote and build support for a much-needed online organ donation registry in Alberta. The gaping hole of not having an online registry is costing Albertans dearly, some with their lives. The students are in the gallery today with some of the community partners of their focus group as well as two of their instructors. We have students Ashley Anctil, Caitlin Beck, Jarvis Butac, Desiree Ehresman, Gabrielle McDonald, and Bryson Daudlin. With them today are community partners Lynda King, Helen Markussen-Brown, and Ken Martin. Also with them are two Medicine Hat College instructors, Susan Sexsmith and Denise Hellman. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, your second introduction. My apologies for not catching your eye earlier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very glad to come back to Edmonton yesterday and to be in the House. Of course, in politics we meet an awful lot of people through different walks of life. Something I've never done before in this Legislature is introduce someone who is not only married to one of my colleagues but has become a very good friend, and that is Sherry Drysdale, who is married to our Minister of Infrastructure. The reason I wanted to introduce her today, I think on behalf of most MLAs that are sitting in this House today, is to thank the spouses that support us every day in the work that we do here as we enter into a long session.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there is much excitement this week. One of those pieces of excitement this week is that it is Sherry's birthday tomorrow. It is my birthday on Thursday, and it is budget day. So it is a festive week in the Legislature. Sherry, I'd like you to rise and receive a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs has an introduction.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an extreme pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly my biggest supporter, my best friend, my partner in business and in life for the last 35 years, my wife, Joanne Weadick.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other introductions? The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. It is indeed an honour to introduce an individual who is the backbone of the lady that was introduced earlier. Wayne Cunningham hails from my constituency. He's

seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask that he stand and receive the warm welcome because he is truly the backbone of his wife.

Members' Statements

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

A Meaningful Life Collaborative Sculpture

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your recognition of persons with developmental disabilities in the Legislature rotunda this morning was a perfect way to open today's session. We were all honoured to meet the many outstanding individuals responsible for creating the beautiful sculpture titled *A Meaningful Life*, that was showcased today.

Three years ago people let Alex Hillyard, CEO for PDD Calgary, know that they didn't want to have a traditional business plan, that they wanted to have something that was unique. Artists with developmental disabilities and their families talked about what a meaningful life meant to them, and five themes emerged: Connecting to Community, Contributing to Society, Independence, Relationships, and Dignity. Over the next two years they worked with acclaimed artist Jeff de Boer, and their vision soon became a reality. Twenty-four very talented artists with developmental disabilities created beautiful individual art pieces to represent each of the five themes. Their art was created with heart and soul. It was unveiled in Calgary on April 1, 2012, and *A Meaningful Life* sculpture was then created to capture this interwoven journey. It is clearly inspirational, and it is also memorable, Mr. Speaker. It is building a legacy for the PDD community because it speaks to the five themes, including dignity and respect, that are important for everyone in the community. We all want this for our families, our friends, our neighbours.

Congratulations and thank you to the 24 artists, Jeff de Boer, PDD Calgary, Prospect Human Services Society, and the In-Definite Arts Society for your passion and your inspiration. I know that this morning you heard our Premier invite you to consider having the Alberta Legislature be a permanent home for your impressive sculpture, and we're really hoping that you'll agree.

Congratulations.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a delight to be back. I'm looking forward to debating issues with my colleagues not only on the opposition benches but also my colleagues opposite.

Integrity in Government

Ms Smith: Public trust is sacred. It is the foundation on which everything we do as elected officials rests. We all must work hard not only to earn it but also to preserve it and protect it. If we lose it, watch out; we won't last long in these seats.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a problem with trust. The fall session ended three months ago with the government under a cloud of scandal and broken promises. There are no less than four full-scale investigations currently under way into this government's questionable conduct. Illegal campaign contributions, health care queue-jumping, privacy breaches, and, of course, the infamous tobacco litigation contract are all under scrutiny, with reports expected in this session. Now the Premier's promise to run a balanced budget and stay out of debt lies in tatters next to the rest of the pledges that she campaigned on and she will not be able

to deliver. It's no wonder that more and more Albertans are losing trust in their government every single day.

This government has a monumental task ahead of itself to rebuild that trust. Trust is difficult to earn and almost impossible to get back once it's been broken. We need to look no further than the baffling messages this Premier continues to send on the upcoming budget. She says that she won't raise taxes or cut spending and will balance the budget, all while putting money back into savings and building everything that she's promised to build. Mr. Speaker, if you can find a grain of logic or consistency somewhere in there, please feel free to point it out.

It all comes back to trust, Mr. Speaker, trust and credibility. You can only say one thing and do another for so long until you start to lose both. Now, my advice to the Premier is this: don't promise what you can't deliver, and if you do promise, make sure you do it. If you won't listen to me, listen to Albertans because they are sending you the exact same message.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Fallen Four in Memoriam

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Candles again dotted the landscape at the Fallen Four Memorial Park in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, on March 3 as a community gathered once more to remember. They were there to bring light to the darkness that descended eight years ago when four young police officers were shot and killed in the Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituency.

I ask you to join me in remembering the vibrant lives of constables Peter Schiemann, Leo Johnston, Brock Myrol, and Anthony Gordon, that ended tragically on March 3, 2005. We remember them, and our thoughts go out to their families, their friends, their troop mates, their co-workers, and the communities of Whitecourt, Mayerthorpe, and the surrounding areas that embraced them.

Thanks to the Mayerthorpe Fallen Four Memorial Society there is a beautiful six-acre memorial park that was built to honour Peter, Leo, Brock, and Anthony plus other police and military forces. It also reminds us that wounds heal and that new beauty is possible in time through nature and community spirit. In this park four bronze statues stand on guard with a 24-foot centre obelisk that salutes all peace officers, policemen, soldiers, and all who have given their lives for their uniform. The volunteers who built this park, maintain it, and bring everyone together for the candlelighting service are true Albertans, proud of those who protect us and ensuring that those who are gone are never forgotten.

Today I wear my Fallen Four pin with pride as a reminder that the brave are forever remembered, and I ask everyone in this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Position

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be back for this third phase of the First Session. In my first-ever question in the Assembly last May I pointed out that there was already a \$2 billion hole in the budget, and I warned that it could climb to as high as \$5 billion, and here we are. The Liberals want to raise income taxes to bridge the gap, the NDs want to raise royalties,

we in the Wildrose think the government has enough revenue, but we don't really know what the Premier thinks. She promised a balanced budget, more spending, no debt, increased saving, and no tax increases. How can all of this be possible?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, on April 23 last year Albertans said that they wanted a government that they could trust to govern through good times and bad times. On April 23 last year times were good. In fact, we knew even then, in a responsible way, that we were going to anticipate challenges with respect to our fiscal plan. I believe the Leader of the Opposition was at the same Economic Summit that I was at three weeks ago, February 9, when industry leaders stood up and said that what we're seeing right now is unexpected. Regardless, we know that we can guide this province forward. That's exactly what we're going to do when we table the budget on Thursday to support families and communities and infrastructure.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Dow Jones just hit an all-time high today, not exactly a sign of hard times.

Given that Alberta gets \$40 billion in revenue but the Premier likes to spend \$44 billion, isn't the simplest solution simply to control government spending?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting news with respect to the Dow Jones, but anyone who actually understands how an economy works understands that it's a heck of a lot more complicated than that. Albertans understand that, and Albertans understand a differential. [interjections]

I would suggest that if the Leader of the Opposition wants to see how a governing party builds a budget, pay attention on Thursday.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know you've forgotten a few rules from before. One of them is to be polite and respectful and honour the dignity of other members. Whether they're asking a question or answering one, they deserve the same respect.

Please proceed with your final supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are looking for leadership, and they have yet to see it from this Premier. Can we have a clear commitment today that in the budget on Thursday the government will not try to fudge or hide or bury or obscure the true size of the cash deficit?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Finance has clearly set out every quarter since the last election and before that what the fiscal plan is and what the fiscal situation is for this government, and there is no reason to presume or to even suggest for any reason that that would be any different on Thursday.

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

Ms Smith: I look forward to seeing whether the Finance minister keeps that commitment.

Fiscal Responsibility

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the fall session ended three months ago with the government under a siege of scandals, ethical lapses, and spending blunders, and here we are again. The only thing that has changed is that we can't ask questions about the tobacco litigation that's being investigated, the illegal donations being exposed, the queue-jumping being probed, and the privacy breaches that are under review. But we can ask about their disregard for fiscal prudence, which has us looking at a \$4 billion, \$5 billion, \$6

billion deficit. It's no wonder Albertans have lost trust in this government. What big promise will they break next?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, you know what else hasn't changed since last session? The tone from the opposition; not the questions but the tone.

I'll tell you that as we move forward and we present the budget on Thursday, it has been built in consultation with Albertans based on what we talked about in the election that ended April 23 when Albertans elected a Progressive Conservative government that has built a successful economy that is leading Canada and continues to make that commitment. That is what Albertans voted for, and we will keep our promise to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm awfully sorry if my tone is hurting the Premier's feelings.

Given that the Premier first characterized the fiscal mess as a revenue problem until she acknowledged, once at least anyway, that it may be a spending problem, how can Albertans have any confidence that the Premier can provide a solution if she doesn't even understand the problem?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as usual what we see from the opposition is extremism and ideology that does not actually understand how to build a government that provides services to Albertans, continues to invest in families and communities, is prudent with taxpayers' dollars, and also makes sure that we're continuing to build our economy and open markets outside of our borders. That's what Albertans voted for. That is what we will deliver. That is what people will see on Thursday.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, running balanced budgets isn't an issue of being right wing or left wing; it's an issue of being competent or incompetent.

Now, if the Premier is ruling out a tax increase and she's committed to meeting all of her spending promises and she's going to balance the budget and she won't admit to taking us back into debt, how can we expect that this budget is going to be an honest reflection of Alberta's true fiscal situation?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I've got an awful lot of confidence in our Minister of Finance. The other thing I will say is that Albertans have confidence in that minister. When we start talking about decisions that we need to make in government, we will build community and we will build infrastructure. You know some of the places where we'll build that infrastructure? Even though that opposition party says that we need to cut back on infrastructure, we are investing in schools in opposition ridings and in government ridings to ensure that kids have places to go to school, to ensure that there are hospitals being built so that people have access to health care services everywhere in this community. That is good government. It is not ideological. It's balancing the interests of Albertans in a way that allows everyone to thrive in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. leader, your third and final set of questions.

Ms Smith: Clearly, the Premier hasn't read our 10-year, \$50 billion, debt-free capital plan. I'll make sure to send her a copy.

Medevac Services

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister just keeps making a mess of things. You remember how he bungled the closing of the

Carmangay seniors' centre and then blamed AHS for a communication mess? Then, of course, he claims that the health expense scandal is all in the past, but it's clear that the lavish spending continues. He's botched the negotiations with the doctors, created issues with rural ambulance service, and now there are medevac concerns in Alberta's north. Now, I know the Premier issued a statement today trying to reassure people, but we're not convinced. What's the plan?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, let's remember that medevac is used for two purposes. It's used to provide emergency support for patients, and it's also used to allow patients to commute with their doctors, when they're already in the health care system, to Edmonton for treatment. The Health Quality Council gave us a very specific plan with 18 points, 18 recommendations, that we have followed completely to ensure that medevac in northern Alberta continues to be available and safe and will support families. The worst thing that we can do – and, unfortunately, we continue to see it – is to fearmonger and scare people. It is not necessary. The Health Quality Council has said that medevac will work, and we have confidence that it will.

Ms Smith: I'm still going to try to seek some clarity, Mr. Speaker. Given the release from the Premier that says that "Government of Alberta aircraft will begin flying out of the Edmonton International Airport on March 15" and given it also says that "government employees will no longer be boarding flights at the City Centre airport", it makes me wonder: will government planes full of cabinet ministers still be landing at the Edmonton municipal airport? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Premier has the floor.

2:00

Ms Redford: No.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, you have to understand that we often have these lawyerly nuances from our Premier, so I just want to get a firm commitment, because the Premier's statement wasn't really all that clear, that all government aircraft will end service in and out of the City Centre Airport on March 15.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this question has been asked; this question has been answered. This statement has been made for the past month. This is simply another example of wasting time in this Legislature on issues that are not directly related when the information is clearly available. However, what I would suggest is that if the opposition is concerned, maybe they'd like to send one of their researchers out with a camera to start taking pictures from the 15th on to see whether or not what I'm saying is actually the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be back.

Provincial Tax Policy

Dr. Sherman: It's well known that the Premier was once a great admirer of progressive leaders such as Joe Clark and Peter Lougheed, who believed in tax fairness. Even Ralph Klein used it to balance the budget. But now the government of the richest province in Canada is broke because it abandoned progressive income tax in favour of a 10 per cent flat tax. To the Premier: why

is it okay for the government to give away billions to the wealthy few while asking everyday Albertans to foot the bill?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's ridiculous for the hon. leader to stand up and say that this province is broke. We have a heritage fund. We have savings. Every single citizen of Alberta has the right to be entitled to say that we have net assets in this province. We are the only province in Canada with net assets on a per capita basis. One of the reasons that we are in that position is because we've ensured that we have a competitive tax position to the rest of the country. We don't need to change it, and we're not going to.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, what's ridiculous is that in a boom they can't balance the budget.

The Premier doesn't have the courage to ask the wealthy to a pay a little more. That would help the Premier to keep her promise of sustainable, predictable funding for health care, education, municipalities. Instead, the Premier is ignoring common sense, reason, and the 70 per cent of Albertans who are calling for a progressive income tax instead of cuts. Why, Premier? Why are you ignoring 70 per cent of Albertans, who want tax fairness?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have made a commitment to be prudent, to be responsible, and to be accountable. We are tabling a budget on Thursday that is going to ensure that we make that commitment to Albertans so that we can keep building for families and communities, we can do it in a responsible way, and we can continue to grow the economy. We can do all of that because we have the understanding, which years of experience has brought to us, that if you integrate the work that you're doing, you can make this effective, and you can ensure that generations will continue to succeed in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Final supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister said that it was important for this government to show how lean and mean it can be. Again to the Premier. Who exactly is your government planning on being mean to: nurses, teachers, students, the mayor of Calgary, or seniors trying to get more than one bath a week? Clearly, the government is pretty nice to their wealthy donors.

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, if you wish.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] That's absolutely right. There was a question in that.

On Thursday we are tabling a budget that is going to ensure that we are prudent and that we are responsible, that we are continuing to provide sustainable funding to vulnerable Albertans, and to make sure that we're making the right decisions this year to ensure success for future generations. That's what Albertans asked us to do last year, and that's what we'll do.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Health Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You just can't trust this PC government to keep its promises. During the election the PCs made many promises to improve health care, including 140 new family care clinics and 5,000 new long-term care spaces, but while they promised there wouldn't be service cuts to health care, we've already seen layoffs and cutbacks across Alberta. To the Premier: considering that her government will not deliver a

throne speech to outline their priorities, can the Premier explain why she's already broken her health care promises to Albertans?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this may very well be the perception of the leader of this party, but it is not the reality. The fact is that we as a government are continuing to invest in the services that matter to Albertans, including health care and including education. Those are the choices that we've made because we understand that those are Alberta's priorities. The budget on Thursday will clearly set out those priorities. Those priorities reflect what Albertans asked us to do on April 23 last year, what they talked to our Minister of Finance and Associate Minister of Finance about all through the summer. Also, consultations with respect to health care were fundamental to the decisions that we made. All of that will be reflected on Thursday. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think they're just thumping past the graveyard.

Albertans simply cannot trust this government to keep its promises on health care. Given that the WestView hospital in Stony Plain is facing a \$450,000 cut to its services and the transition unit at the Royal Alexandra hospital has been closed, will the Premier admit that this government has failed Albertans with a string of broken health care promises?

Ms Redford: You know, Mr. Speaker, what we have in this province is a system of health care that allows people to get some of the best health care in the world, and that's because of the doctors and the nurses and the researchers that we have here. One of the reasons that we're going to be able to continue to maintain that level of service is because we have people that are providing us with advice, and we have a Minister of Health that understands that we need to make decisions along with Alberta Health Services that allow us to streamline services and deliver services in an effective way because we're concerned about health outcomes. It's why we're investing in primary health care, it's why we're investing in aligning services, and it's why we have facilities such as the Stollery and the Alberta Children's hospital, that provide services in a very different way to families. It's effective.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Albertans just can't trust this government to keep its promises on health care. Given that this PC government promised that they would meet the needs of thousands of seniors waiting for long-term care and given that the government is closing public long-term care facilities across the province, including in Carmangay, Bashaw, and Red Deer, when will the Premier admit that her government has failed Albertans with yet another broken promise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is certainly not failing Albertans when it comes to continuing care or any other part of the health care system. This government has repeatedly kept its promise to add a thousand new continuing care spaces per year. We are on track to reach our commitment of 5,000 spaces over five years. We can look across the health care system in many other areas for reminders of how the government continues to invest and how our dedicated health care professionals continue to deliver.

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

Medevac Services
(continued)

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Health Quality Council reported that this government's decision on EMS was sloppy and mismanaged. Today the government is poised to make an even bigger mistake by moving medevac to the Edmonton International Airport. In 10 days this fundamental change will affect all northern Albertans, adding at least 40 to 50 minutes in emergency wait times. STARS air ambulance says that it's too early to know if they can fulfill the new role envisioned by AHS. Will the Premier do the right thing, delay the relocation of medevac, and consult with doctors to ensure that any changes to medevac services will not cost lives?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this fearmongering is not constructive. Doctors have been involved. Technical advisers who actually understand emergency services have been involved. Clearly, a decision has been made by the people of Edmonton and the city of Edmonton that we are no longer able to use the municipal airport. Because of that, we have made the responsible decisions, the right decisions, and the decisions that will continue to protect families in northern Alberta. Medevac will work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a total of 58 doctors have signed a letter saying that the relocation of medevac will cost lives, do you think it is okay for this government to shortchange northern Albertans and put their lives at risk when you can just delay the decision to explore every possibility in order to save lives?

2:10

The Speaker: Please be reminded that questions that are speculative ought not be asked in that way. We understand the intent of it – we don't normally call for opinions – but if somebody from the front bench wants to answer it, go ahead.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government can do a lot better than the speculative questions that are being proffered by the other side. The opinions of people that live in the communities across the province are going to be informed directly by the quality and the accuracy of information that is presented to them by all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, planning for this move began well over a year ago, when Edmonton city council announced its decision to close the City Centre Airport. I can assure this House as the Minister of Health that there is absolutely no compromise to patient safety or quality of care as a result of this transition, and anything short of that in a message to the public is fearmongering.

Mr. Saskiw: Fifty-eight doctors say differently.

Given that this Premier has previously said – and I quote – that we need to ensure that we are providing as a provincial government the services that northern Alberta needs, how can Albertans trust this Premier if she won't even keep just this one promise and provide northern Albertans with timely access to emergency medical care? Listen to the doctors and delay the closure. Listen to the doctors.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, let's remember that north of Edmonton there are thriving communities with hospitals and

doctors and health infrastructure currently. It is not as if everyone who lives in northern Alberta, the minute something happens, is shipped on a plane to Edmonton in order to have their health care needs met. We as a Progressive Conservative government have made a commitment to health care in northern Alberta. We are continuing to make that investment in things such as the new Grande Prairie regional hospital, enhancements in Fort McMurray. We know from experience that strong health care professionals across northern Alberta are providing effective health care services. Medevac is part of that, it will continue to be, and Albertans can trust that.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now we get to the real questions.

Keystone Pipeline Project

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, last week the U.S. State Department issued a draft environmental impact study on Keystone XL which concluded that the project would not significantly contribute to the warming of the planet. Despite this, some critics still suggest that Alberta has not done enough to help push this project through and bolster much-needed market access. My question is for the hon. Premier. Considering that this fight isn't over, what is the Premier doing to help get Keystone XL on track?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd actually think that the opposition would be interested in this since they spend all their time talking about how not enough has been done. One of the things that was really important in the environmental impact assessment that the State Department issued on Friday was that there was Alberta data in that, data that was provided by the government of Alberta as an intervenor with respect to the hearings in Nebraska and the hearings in the regulatory process in the United States. So not only has there been political involvement – working with Ambassador Jacobson and Ambassador Doer, my four trips to Washington, which we're going to continue to pursue on the advice of Ambassador Doer – but to know that the data that's in that report is having compelling reasons with respect to environmental impact is very important for Keystone, and we're still very optimistic.

Speaker's Ruling
Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Clearly, someone has an alarm clock or something else that has rung three different times now. Whoever it is, please don't put it on silent; just put it off. Otherwise, you and that piece of equipment will be asked to be put off for a while. Whoever has that going, please stop it now. Thank you.

The hon. member.

Keystone Pipeline Project
(continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the hon. Premier: with all this attention being paid to Keystone and the U.S., has the government lost sight of market diversification and seeking out new markets?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the work that's going on right now with respect to Alberta's export economy is fundamental, and that takes a number of forms. The first, of course, is continuing to

pursue other pipeline options. We're having tremendous success right now and good progress with Premier Alward in New Brunswick and Premier Marois in Quebec. We think it's going to be very important to ensure that we get Alberta's product to tidewater as soon as possible so that Albertans, who own the resource, get a fair price for that resource. That's fundamental.

The other work that we're doing is with respect to refining and upgrading so that not only do we have other markets to go to with bitumen but with other products that would also be able to access different markets. It's fundamental to diversification, and we're going to continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Premier: given that there are some who believe that the Canadian energy strategy is nothing more than highbrow motherhood and apple pie, can the Premier tell me how a Canadian energy strategy will help establish increased market access? [interjection]

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am not at all surprised to see the opposition jeer at this, but the reason we're having success with respect to the eastern pipeline, the reason we're able to work with people like Premier Wall, who is in Washington today talking about Alberta's environmental record, is that Canadians understand that working together, developing an integrated energy economy, is our greatest opportunity for economic success so that we can continue to be a leader in energy. I do know that, very particularly, the opposition a year ago were quite surprised by this, didn't understand what it was, clearly still don't. But we do, Canadians do, the Prime Minister does, the Premiers do, and this is what's going to lead to success for Alberta and Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. This government continues to make a mess of our health care system, and it continues to lose the trust of Albertans. Yesterday's Health Quality Council report shows that this government has its fingerprints all over deteriorating patient care when it comes to the EMS system. Despite recommendations there still remain outstanding wait times throughout Alberta. Here in Edmonton the response time has continued to increase since 2009. That is precious time that can mean the difference between life and death. Does this government have any actual plans to improve response times?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the hon. member missed the substance of the news conference that was held yesterday, where the Health Quality Council presented a very clear road map to address many of the issues with ground ambulances. As this House will know, in 2009 a previous government made a policy decision, which we support, to recognize the fact that EMS is part of health care and should be part of our provincial health care system. It is true that there were some delays in consolidation of dispatch services in the province and some of the other very large-scale initiatives that are involved in creating a provincial EMS system, but this review provides a clear road map, and I've provided clear direction to Alberta Health Services to implement these recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that FOIP documents reveal that the amount of time ambulances in Edmonton are on red alert has ballooned from a total of three hours in 2009 to 76 hours four years later, when is the government specifically going to make sure that patients don't suffer?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the very dedicated doctors and nurses and other professionals that work in our system make sure, in fact, that patients' needs are addressed and are addressed well each and every day. The hon. member should know that wait times in emergency departments are primarily a function of flow within the emergency department and in the hospital generally, not a function of the EMS system. Alberta Health Services made some very great strides in the last year in reducing occupancy rates in our hospitals, in eliminating much of the need for alternate levels of care placements for people who are waiting for continuing care, and in many other initiatives that have greatly improved the flow within our system at the same time as we see a huge growth in population and the number of visits, consequentially, to ER departments.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, given that this government seems to be having trouble understanding the impact of minutes in emergency care and the danger of leaving our first response teams on red alert, when will this government stop running out the clock and put the interests of patients first?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we most certainly do put the interests of patients first, and part of that involves looking at objective evidence, taking expert advice, and forming opinions and making decisions based on that as opposed to hearsay and other measures that are intended, I can only see, to scare the public.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very, very busy health care system in Alberta. It's a function of our economic prosperity. It's a function of the facts such as the number of Albertans – I believe 100,000 came to this province last year – and it's also a function of our commitment to continue to invest in health care. The issues that are discussed in the Health Quality Council report are issues that you would find in any major, growing centre across the country. What's important is the action that we're taking to deal with those. That is what Albertans can take away from it.

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

2:20

Medevac Services

(continued)

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've heard, the City Centre Airport is closing, and medevac services are being relocated to the Edmonton International Airport. The Health Quality Council of Alberta review stated that "the main patient safety concern is that an increase in journey time for critically-ill . . . patients could have a negative effect on their well-being." The U of A hospital is a 30-minute drive from the EIA, and the Royal Alex is a 37-minute drive from the EIA. To the Minister of Health: how can you assure northern Albertans that your department is addressing transportation times that will be increased as a result of the medevac relocation?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. When Edmonton city council announced their decision to close the City Centre Airport, we asked the Health Quality Council to conduct a study of the most appropriate site for the medevac facility immediately. That report was completed over a year ago. As was mentioned earlier, it contains 18 recommendations. One of the things that it emphasizes and that we continue to emphasize is that the vast majority of these flights are for scheduled services that are provided in our major tertiary care hospitals.

The other thing, of course, Mr. Speaker, that's important is to recognize, as members opposite do not, that before patients are medevacked, they are actually in the health care system. They have been treated, they have been stabilized, and with the aid of the Health Quality Council recommendations, we know they will be cared for properly in transit and upon their arrival.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Health. The Health Quality Council of Alberta reviewed the relocation of medevac services and made 18 recommendations to ensure patient safety is upheld after the services are moved. How can you assure my constituents that these recommendations are being acted on and not swept beneath the carpet?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we have tracked and reported on the progress in implementing those 18 recommendations. As the hon. member would know, all of them were accepted. My understanding is that almost all of them have now been implemented. There are a few that are in the process of final implementation. With the aid of that and with the knowledge of the fact that our patients' care begins before they leave for their medevac flight and with the knowledge that physicians and other health care professionals are supervising that transit and that care, Albertans can have great confidence in the quality and safety of this system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allen: Thank you. To the same minister. Paramedics in my constituency have told me that the patients with severe trauma are already being treated in our Fort McMurray hospital without having to be transferred to Edmonton. How can our hospital continue to play a key role to prevent transfers?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. the Premier mentioned in answer to an earlier question, we have some fine, fine health care facilities across northern Alberta. Northern Alberta residents have access to CT scanners. They have access to other specialized care in or near their home communities. That care assists us in providing as many resources as possible to prevent the need for patients to be transferred for scheduled services here in Edmonton. But when patients do require that transfer, we know that the medevac system is safe, it's of high quality, and it operates efficiently in order to bring them here for the care we need.

We will continue to invest, Mr. Speaker, in hospital expansions in Grande Prairie and in other communities.

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

Emergency Medical Services (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a time when Alberta has increases in population, including seniors, and increased complaints about the lack of community care, this government has frozen home-care services, which means an increase in EMS service demands and emergency room visits. Does the minister not see how cutting home-care services is going to worsen the EMS situation?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, home-care services have not been cut in Alberta. Last year in the budget this government committed 45 million additional dollars to providing enhanced home-care services to allow patients who can be appropriately treated in the community to come home sooner. Alberta Health Services has made some very important operational changes in the last few months that will see greater numbers of residents in various communities across the province having access to home care who otherwise would not have, as a result of more efficient home care delivery. We know and the hon. member knows that much of the future of continuing care in this province remains contingent on continued investment in home care. We're committed to keep doing that.

Dr. Swann: Of course, the minister doesn't mention that most of that money went to private providers.

Seven Albertan communities have EMS staff that are shared between fire and ambulance, integrated. It's working both efficiently and well. Tell us how your EMS plan will strengthen, not destroy, the relationship between EMS and fire.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, at the press conference yesterday we discussed this matter, and I made it very clear that volunteer fire departments and our fire services are very closely tied with our municipalities, who also contract and decide who operates 911. It's very important that they still have control at the local level to manage that. I've appointed our associate minister to work with our fire services to make sure we have the integration necessary so that every single person in every single community knows that when they pick up 911, whether it's fire, police, or ambulance, they're going to get the care they need.

Dr. Swann: To the Health minister: how will the problem of poaching ambulance services from rural areas to urban, leaving rural areas vulnerable, change under this plan?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a good question, and this is an issue that the Health Quality Council talked about at length yesterday, when the report was released. The answer is to complete dispatch consolidation across the province. We began with over 35 dispatch services across Alberta. That number has been gradually reduced. The end result will be consolidation of dispatch in two main centres, Edmonton and Calgary, with a satellite service in Peace River. The dispatch consolidation allows EMS staff to see all of the ambulance fleet across the province. It allows them to strategically and appropriately deploy ambulance services as close as possible to the scene where ambulance services are required and to enable that backup to be provided.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You cannot trust this government to stand up for Alberta schools. Public education in Alberta has been a train wreck, and the trail of broken promises leads straight to the top. This PC government won an election promising stable funding for schools, full-day kindergarten, and new schools in places like Fort McMurray, which hasn't seen a new public school in 26 years. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why is this government breaking its promises to improve Alberta schools at a time when they need it most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Train wreck? Really? You have the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who says that Alberta's public education system is amongst the best in the world. Others say that Alberta's public education system is the best in the English-speaking world. We invest very heavily per child in Alberta, we have the best paid teachers in the country, and we are proud that we've got the best standard across this country.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, given that the Education minister used teachers' private e-mails to contact them with his PC ad campaign and continues to interfere with local negotiations by telling school boards what they can and cannot offer teachers and given that this minister, as well, blew off a golden opportunity to settle with teachers in the fall, when will this government take responsibility for the failure of provincial contract talks and stop interfering with local negotiations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that member calls the hard work of Alberta teachers and school administrators and our parents and our students a train wreck, I think that member over there really needs to check the facts and really understand that we have one of the best education systems in not only Canada but the English-speaking world. We're proud of that. We put forward a fair and reasonable offer to our teachers. We're disappointed that it was not accepted, but we have a strong system. We're proud of that, and we're going to continue to maintain it.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you rose on a point of order at 2:29. It's been registered.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, given that there are less than 50 modules available for the more than 500 that are needed across this province and given that this minister had limited modules and portables so that hundreds of families, for example in south Edmonton, had their lives turned upside down by having to move their school kids from school in the middle of the next year because of the shortage, why does this government not take action to prevent overcrowding and start improving Alberta schools instead of empty, empty, windbag promises like you're giving here today?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those that make promises are those that the public doesn't trust to run a strong education system like we have. The fact is that we have actions to demonstrate the success of Alberta's public education system. It's a great system.

We've committed to continued infrastructure investment, 50 new schools. I would ask the member to pay attention to the budget on Thursday, where we continue to show that we're investing in families, that we're investing in our communities. We're going to make sure that Alberta is one of the best places to live, to work, and to go to school.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Supports for Couples Aging in Place

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I travelled to 23 towns across Alberta to hear directly from seniors. I spoke with a 91-year-old woman whose husband of 68 years had Alzheimer's. He was in acute care awaiting placement, and she was able to visit and care for him. Sadly, the acute-care bed was needed, sending her husband to a bed more than a hundred kilometres away. That's 68 years of marriage dissolved by a single stroke of the government pen. A month later the man died all alone. To the Associate Minister of Seniors: will you please revisit the policy that forces families to be split apart so that no other couple has to leave a spouse dying more than an hour away?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Everybody knows how well we've done over the last number of years adding continuing care spaces to our communities. Whether it's in Hanna, whether it's in Lacombe, whether it's in Calgary, whether it's in Red Deer, whether it's in Boyle, whether it's in Sundre, we're going to continue to add spaces around this province like you've never seen before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, that's not the truth. People are being removed from their communities.

Given that this government is ignoring the trend of separating couples and is all talk and no action on allowing Albertans to age in place together, when will the decision-makers on that side of the House realize that seniors built this province and make it a priority to ensure that all couples are able to age together?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the dignity and respect for our seniors aging in place is very, very important to me and very important to our government. Every one of the spaces that I just talked about, every one of those communities where we opened up new living spaces had opportunities and have opportunities for couples. Every one of our spaces going forward – we just closed the ASLI grant on February 22. All of those communities will have an opportunity for couples to age in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we heard of another senior who was told that his wife would be sent 100 kilometres east of Hanna and the husband would be sent 100 kilometres west to Sundre, leaving them more than two hours apart after 60 years of marriage, will the Associate Minister of Seniors trust Albertans and end the policy that forces seniors into divorce by nursing home?

Mr. VanderBurg: Like I stated earlier, Mr. Speaker, we always strive to keep people as close to their homes as possible. The health care providers will always determine the best place, the

safest place for an individual to go to. I have to say that it's not always in our own communities in remote places in the province that we have that safe place for them to be discharged to from an acute-care facility, but we always strive to get them home, as close as possible to their families and their loved ones.

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

Medevac Services (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. People in northern Alberta are calling for the province to expropriate the City Centre Airport in order to keep it open for medevac services from northern Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Would this even be legal for the province to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province does have the legal ability to expropriate the land utilizing the Expropriation Act, but anytime the province considers utilizing the Expropriation Act, we do it with a lot of consideration for the landowners, in this case the city of Edmonton. I find it incredibly ironic that Keith Wilson, who's the advocate that's associated with the party opposite, is travelling around telling everybody that we should just expropriate, do the largest expropriation in the history of the province, with no consideration for the city of Edmonton. We protect property rights, and we respect individuals' ability to utilize those property rights.

The Speaker: Let's be careful about referencing people who aren't here and able to reply.
The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that it's legal to do so, Mr. Minister, if the province were to expropriate this land, what would you expect it to cost?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we've heard an incredible variation in the numbers. I know that our department has reviewed it. This would have to be a process, if we followed through with it, that would go to a board for a hearing. It's very difficult to assess. We have some people who would support expropriating the land, saying that it's only a hundred million dollars, and we have the city of Edmonton, that says that it's close to \$2 billion, and we have other people that say that if you have to pay the municipality for the lost tax revenue that would come from such a large, valuable piece of property on the outskirts of the downtown of a large metropolitan centre, it could be \$6 billion. We don't exactly know, but it's a lot of money when it does not impact one iota the delivery of medevac services to the north.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the concerns of people in northern Alberta about continued and timely access to medical facilities in Edmonton, will you consider undertaking a detailed study into the potential for expropriating this land and keeping the medevac services running?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is no, and the long answer is no. It would cost money to do a detailed study, and quite frankly none of it impacts medevac

services, so we're going to allow the city of Edmonton to develop the land as they see fit and continue to pour our attention into supplying medevac services to people in the north.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-South East.

Subsidized Social Housing Program Abuse

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned about six-figure income earners living in taxpayer-subsidized social housing – some of the residents in question are earning as much \$112,000 per year – this gross abuse of a program in place to assist Alberta's hard-working low-income earners. It appears this program is being gamed by individuals with more than enough means to support themselves while less fortunate Albertans are left to compete for affordable housing. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how did these egregious cases of abuse just sail through your department undetected for over a decade?

Mr. Griffiths: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's incredibly sad that the opposition would attack the Heart River Housing foundation, who manages those housing complexes for those who need affordable housing. Now, I know that they'd rented it out at market value – they give the implication that they gave it to them for free – in a very small community, and the Heart River Housing foundation felt that they weren't sure if they wanted to sell it because they were always worried that a week later somebody who needed affordable housing in the community might need it and that it was better to rent it out at market rate than to close it and leave no options for those who need affordable housing in that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the ministry's own website suggests that the housing programs are responsible for “ensuring Albertans of modest means have access to affordable housing that meets their basic needs,” can the minister explain how on earth a six-figure salary met the criteria for modest means and why Albertans should trust in your ability to manage the program?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, let's try this again. We have a very small community, where they just have a couple of units for affordable housing, and nobody needed the housing for 11 years, so it was rented out at market rate rather than sitting there vacant and deteriorating. They thought that they could get some value, and that money was poured into other affordable housing units to support those in need. I'd like to know what this member would like to do. Would he like to sell it off and leave that community in the lurch with no affordable housing or maybe just leave it vacant and let it deteriorate? This is sound management. They're going to evaluate their properties to see if they need to sell it or keep it for that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Finance minister: given that an individual earning \$112,000 a year was somehow deemed by this government as having a revenue problem, is this how you can look Albertans in the eye with a straight face and

suggest that a government earning \$40 billion a year also has a revenue problem? [interjections]

2:40

Mr. Horner: Hon. members, the question was to the Finance minister. We thought he was going to talk about the application process, so cool your jets.

Mr. Speaker, I will be honestly telling Albertans on Thursday about the financial situation of this province and the drop in revenue that we have had and experienced in this province, as had just about every jurisdiction in the country, including Canada's GDP.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order at 2:39 during the Minister of Municipal Affairs' first answer, and that has been noted.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

National Social Work Week

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to recognize that March 3 to March 9 is National Social Work Week, like hon. Minister Dave Hancock has already mentioned. This is a time when we can acknowledge registered social workers for their contribution to our province. As you know, I was a social worker myself before being elected. This is a helping profession, and I am passionate about it. Social workers help families stay healthy and resilient, help children to be safe, and assist others to make positive changes in their lives. This often results in creating caring and strong communities in our province.

Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we're always proud of our richness in natural resources. We are rich in energy production, but I like to think that we're also rich in caring people and communities. Alberta is being recognized increasingly in the world as one of the best places to live, to work, and to raise a family. I think the work that social workers have done over the years has definitely contributed to that.

The theme of this year's Social Work Week is Advocating for a Just and Equitable Alberta. Our government is very privileged to work in partnership with the Alberta College of Social Workers to promote this cause further. Strategies are under way to help develop and maintain a skilled workplace and leadership within the social work field.

On this occasion, Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage all Albertans to join our government in saying thank you to social workers in their community for the differences they are making.

Thank you.

Volunteer Support for Stranded Motorists

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, Albertans believe in the good-neighbour policy, and on Sunday, March 3, when a powerful winter storm hit southern Alberta and forced the RCMP to divert travellers off the highway into the nearest town, the people of Claresholm, Fort Macleod, Nanton, and Oyen proved that they are indeed good neighbours. I asked for a list of the volunteers from these communities so that I could honour them on behalf of the government for their extraordinary acts of kindness as they sheltered, comforted, and fed people from a disastrous blizzard. I received three pages of names of businesses and individuals who worked alongside the first responders and their community council

members to help those who were stranded. Claresholm Fire Chief Kelly Starling told me that there were over 350 registrations at the reception centre, and people were still lined up to register when the highway finally opened after 6 p.m. He told me that the town CEO, Kris Holebeck, did not hesitate to open the arena for shelter and to call on council members and town employees to help the stranded travellers.

It didn't take long for many other volunteers to step up in these communities. They assisted with registrations, organizing billets, serving meals, and pushing cars out of ditches. Kieth Carlson's Roy's Place restaurant donated 200 hot servings of hearty stew, almost worth being stranded for. Individual families opened their homes for those who were too weary to travel and billeted them overnight.

Mr. Speaker, although I told you the story of Claresholm, I know that this story repeated itself in the communities of Fort Macleod, Nanton, and Oyen. We want to thank the RCMP, the fire departments, the municipal councils, the volunteers, the churches, the Royal Canadian Legions, the service organizations, and all the businesses who stepped up and donated everything from shelter and a shoulder to lean on to warm blankets and hot food. Although there's not enough time to name everyone, you know who you are, and in your communities they know who you are.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

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

Medevac Services to Northern Alberta

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Medevac services to northern Alberta in a very literal sense are the lifeblood of their communities. So often we speak about northern Alberta and the tremendous economic potential that lies beneath the soil, but I think this government has forgotten about the people who actually live on top of it. I don't know how else to explain this reckless, irresponsible, and utterly absurd decision to reroute medevac services away from the downtown airport to the Edmonton International Airport effective March 15.

The bottom line here is this. The rerouting of medevac services is going to add between 40 and 50 minutes to every emergency. That's between 40 and 50 minutes added to a dying patient's trip to the hospital before he or she even sees an OR. That's between 40 and 50 minutes that he or she won't spend in life-saving care but in the back of an ambulance on a highway. Mr. Speaker, this isn't about rural versus urban or province versus city. It's about right versus wrong. To allow this decision to proceed and deny residents of my constituency and all northern Albertans the life-saving health care they need is just wrong.

In her party's leadership race the Premier said, and I quote: we need to ensure that we are providing as a provincial government the services northern Alberta needs. Premier, I'm going to hold you to those words. Northern Alberta needs those services. They have a right to those services. The decision to reroute to the Edmonton International Airport isn't going to cut it. Don't take my word for it. Take it from the 58 doctors who put their names to a letter urging you to reconsider.

Delay this decision, Premier. On behalf of the residents of northern Alberta I am pleading with you. Keep your promise for once. Do what is right for once. Don't cut northern Alberta off from life-saving health care.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'm pleased to table five copies of the committee report, dated March 2013, containing its recommendation for the appointment of the Public Interest Commissioner. The copies of this report are being distributed to the members today.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of the introduction of Bill 11, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2013.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be tabling on behalf of the hon. leader of the third party a tabling which reflects the comments that he made during his question, comparing the current government's slashing of spending and previous Premiers'.

Thank you very much. May I continue with my own tablings?

2:50

The Speaker: You have a second tabling?

Ms Blakeman: I have a tabling for myself aside from the tabling I just did on behalf of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

I am now tabling the appropriate number of copies of a fascinating presentation called *Municipal Revenue: An Examination for Discussion*. I want to point out that all of the data used in this does come from the Alberta Ministry of Municipal Affairs except where it is noted. This is really starting to break down the way the combined low – I'm missing the right word – assessment works, which is really creating a difference.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. I will try to do them relatively quickly. The first is from a constituent of mine, Ms Susan Younggren. She is a pharmacist with a number of years of experience. She is concerned about some of the changes the government is contemplating on reimbursement charges. It's a very good letter. I have forwarded it to the minister.

The next is a letter from another constituent, Ms Lori Rosmus. She's highly concerned about the state of Alberta schools. Many of them, as you are aware, are in need of repairs, and the backlog in maintenance is becoming apparent and the size of school classes as well.

The next is an article by Dr. Roger Gibbins. It's entitled *Alberta Must "Double Down" on Heavy Oil*. Included in that, on the second page is a specific reference to the need for Alberta to change its fiscal structure, and if that's too cryptic for everybody here, to raise tax revenues to allow us to do both predictable, sustainable funding as well as to save for the inevitable day when we run out of this stuff.

The last tabling is comments made by a former MLA, a colleague of mine, Mr. Harry Chase, at the health care inquiry. As we know, Mr. Chase was very passionate about fighting for the issues that many people care about in this province.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of postcard submissions that Albertans made to our prebudget tour, that we conducted in the last few weeks. I have some comments and interesting input from Robert, Bill, Helen, Sharon, Don, Lynne, and others. For example, Robert would like to see the government change the flat tax back to a progressive income tax. Submissions like this clearly show the priorities of Albertans and how out of touch this PC government actually is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has already tabled. Hon. members, I have a tabling as well, then, unless there are some others. Are there any other tablings? No? Thank you.

I am going to table something pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act, and that is five copies of the following orders that were passed at the December 19, 2012, meeting and at the February 7, 2013, meeting of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: specifically, item 1, Members' Services Committee Order 10/12, Constituency Services Amendment Order No. 26, effective April 1, 2013; item 2, Members' Services Committee Order 01/13, Members' Committee Allowances Amendment Order No. 10, effective February 7, 2013; item 3, Members' Services Committee Order 02/13, Executive Council Salaries Amendment Order No. 09, effective February 7, 2013; and finally, item 4, Members' Services Committee Order 03/13, Members' Allowances Amendment Order No. 25, effective February 7, 2013.

Hon. members, I believe we have a couple of points of order. I think, Edmonton-Strathcona, you were first off the mark. Would you like to proceed with a citation and your point of order, please.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to raise a point of order under – I'm sorry; I should know this – 23 (h), (i), and (j). I should have this memorized. Clearly, it's my first day back. I should have been chanting it last night as I was falling asleep.

Anyway, the reason I rise is in relation to the comments made by the Minister of Service Alberta in response to the comments made in a preamble of a question put to the government, to the Minister of Education in particular, by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. In his question the Member for Edmonton-Calder outlined in his preamble his concern that the public education system is a train wreck. In supporting that suggestion, he pointed to specific issues. He talked about broken promises, Mr. Speaker. He talked

about promising long-term, sustainable funding. He talked about promises of full-day kindergarten. He talked about promises of new schools. He talked about the difficulty or the spectre we've had with the Minister of Education being under investigation for having inappropriately communicated potentially, just potentially obviously, with teachers around bargaining.

He also talked about the issue which we saw on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal* today, where 500 or so children are being asked to move to a school in another part of the city because of difficulties with respect to capital construction in the education system. So those were the things that he was talking about, and he was talking, in essence, about the public system.

The Minister of Service Alberta responded by suggesting that the Member for Edmonton-Calder was actually saying that the work of Alberta teachers was a train wreck, and that, of course, was not what the member had ever suggested. To suggest that the member was accusing Alberta's hard-working public teachers of having work that equates to a train wreck is, of course, everything that breaches 23(h), (i), and (j) in that he made allegations against the member and he imputed false or unavowed motives to another member.

It's particularly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to subsection (i) because essentially here was the Member for Edmonton-Calder using his first question in this session this year to raise concerns about the quality of our education system, concerns that he had heard about as our Education critic in his work meeting with probably now thousands of teachers and ATA locals and school board people across the province over the course of not only our budget tour but also in terms of his day-to-day work as our Education critic. He was taking their concerns into the Legislature to raise the concern that they have about what's happening to our system as a whole.

Then to have the Minister of Service Alberta turn around and impute a motive to him that somehow he didn't think those teachers were doing a good quality of work is really, I think, designed to create disorder in the Legislature and clearly implies an unavowed motive to the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Blakeman: As well as maligning.

Ms Notley: Indeed. He was maligning the Member for Edmonton-Calder by suggesting that he would make such statements.

The member was speaking about specific elements of the public education system, which, I would argue, can fairly be characterized as a bit of a train wreck when you look at everything that we've seen happen in our public education system; i.e., those things that are under the control of this government, which, of course, are the appropriate things for the member to ask the question about, those things which are under the control of this government. Those things he can talk about, and he can characterize it as he characterizes it because that's his right.

The issue is: are those things the things which are within the control of this minister or this cabinet? At no time was he ever suggesting that teachers in this province don't work desperately hard. In fact, they work increasingly hard every day, Mr. Speaker, as a result of the bad decisions and the broken promises that have been made by the people across the way in cabinet, which is the appropriate issue for us to be discussing here in this Legislature during question period.

I would ask that the Minister of Service Alberta withdraw the suggestion that the Member for Edmonton-Calder would ever suggest that teachers are not hard-working people whose quality of

work is very good and whose work, in fact, deserves our support and commendation every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with some delight that I rise to deal with this particular point of order. I would start by indicating that it's no surprise that the hon. member would forget 23(h), (i), and (j), making allegations against another member and imputing false or unavowed motives, because she so seldom has the opportunity to raise those against the members of the government. It so rarely happens. I'm not surprised that she wasn't up last night chanting them, but I am surprised that she fell asleep because I would have thought she would have been trembling with excitement at the context of a new session starting.

Mr. Horner: Weren't we all?

Mr. Hancock: I was.

With respect to her point of order there is, with respect, Mr. Speaker, no point of order. This is a classic definition of the term "hoist with his own petard". The hon. member threw a bomb in talking about the train wreck of the education system when he could have raised some questions, if he had legitimate questions, about some of the things that could be fixed. There are always things that could be fixed. There are always things that could be improved. But no. He tried to explode the whole education system as being a train wreck. In doing so, the shrapnel caught the whole education system, including the most important part of the education system, the thing that holds the education system together and makes it among the best in the world, and that's, of course, excellence in education, excellence in teaching. That's what we have in this province: excellence in teaching.

When the hon. member gets up to raise a question and starts with hyperbole, talking about the train wreck that's the education system – the most important part of the education system is excellence in teaching, which is excellent teachers – he cannot possibly hoist that petard without blowing himself up. It's clearly not the hon. member saying something bad about or casting a false and unavowed motive against the member who raised the question. He did it to himself.

The Speaker: I really don't think we need to prolong this any further unless somebody feels compelled to add something that we haven't heard so far. I've risen so many times on points of order where all we're really doing is trying to seek clarification for something.

Let me give you all a reminder here on day 1 that I'm not going to suffer unparliamentary language in this session, and I'm telling you that right now. If you're going to abuse rules that otherwise call for decorum and dignity in the House and civility, you should observe the rule that talks about not using inflammatory language that is likely to lead to disorder.

That's probably what happened here. One person hears it this way, another person hears it that way, and we have two varying opinions on it. How did he use it, or how did she use it? That leads to a point of order, and that takes up the House's time. That takes up my time, which takes up your time, and that doesn't roll the ball forward. Both sides have aired their differences on this matter, and we're going to move on.

Second point of order. Airdrie, please.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Anderson: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. We will endeavour on this side to do so and hope that the government will as well.

Quoting from the book of Standing Orders, chapter 23, verses (h), (i), and (j), is the citation here. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw specifically questioned the Municipal Affairs minister on a matter regarding public housing and folks who are making six-figure incomes being able to get subsidized housing in some cases. The member specifically asked how something like this could get through the Municipal Affairs ministry over a 10-year period without it being detected. It was a very clear question.

The Municipal Affairs minister then retorted, for some reason alleging baselessly that the member for Calgary-Shaw had impugned the folks that were working on the front lines, who are working on the social housing file in different agencies and so forth, saying that they weren't doing their job. Well, you know, I would say that anybody with a good understanding of the English language – and I know this minister does have a very good understanding of the English language. He's written books that would show that. He's a smart individual. He understands English. Clearly, that was not what the Member for Calgary-Shaw said. Clearly, he was asking this minister how his department had failed. He was not in any way blaming or casting aspersions on the agencies that do that hard front-line work.

I don't want to belabour this, but I would ask that in future the minister just answer the question instead of saying that when we ask a question about health care, we are casting aspersions on the doctors; if we're asking a question on education, it's the teachers; and so forth. I mean, we're not going to get anywhere in here if that's the case moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did hear that the hon. member had cast aspersions on the Heart River Housing foundation, that manages it locally. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation, which runs under Municipal Affairs, gets audited by our Auditor General, and we review those. We take submissions after the local Heart River Housing foundation, the one in this case, does an audit by an independent outside contractor, and they submit the report from the auditor to us. But we don't have all of the details.

The insinuation was that we did something wrong, but obviously the control lies within the Heart River Housing foundation's control. To insinuate that somebody had done something wrong was a direct attack on the Heart River Housing foundation. At least, that's the way I took it. I assumed that the member didn't honestly understand that they manage those affairs. They get very defensive, Mr. Speaker, because they are hard-working people who did their best to manage things at a local level and to serve the needs of local clients. So I did get defensive and accuse them of attacking them because they're the ones who manage it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Well, both sides have had a chance to clear the air. Is there anyone else who feels compelled to add anything to this point of order?

If not, let me just remind people again about not only the language used but the tone, the intent, the timbre with which it is delivered. Quite often we do get a little bit carried away, frankly, on both sides of the House, so we just need to pay a little closer attention to that.

At the same time I might just remind you of *Beauchesne's* 494, where it says, "On rare occasions [certain things] may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." I think that's at play a little bit here. Accordingly, I don't find there to be a point of order, but I do find it a point of clarification. It has been had.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Time Limits

The Speaker: Now, while I'm on my feet, let me just address a couple of other points that were quickly delivered to me over the last little while. It concerns the 35-second rule. Some of you will recall that in a procedural letter that I sent to you, I indicated words to this effect. I read them to you back in May of last year, and I'm going to read them briefly once again.

Members asking a question will be entitled to a main question and two supplementary questions. There should not be preambles to the supplementary questions. However, in keeping with the practice of the last Legislature, questions and answers should be no longer than 35 seconds each. The chair will enforce this time to enable the maximum number of members possible to participate in question period.

So far I've received two notes asking me about the 35-second rule. In fact, in both cases both hon. members indicated that they felt that in some cases we had gone up to 40 seconds and in some cases today we went up to 45 seconds. I want to clarify something for you, and that is that the clock for the 35-second rule does not technically start until the person starts to speak. Okay? So that will probably neutralize a couple of the questions. With respect to the other ones I'm going to check the tape tonight as I do every night after question period, and I'll do some of my own timings. So thank you very much.

In the meantime, please also understand that there are times when I have to cut off a government minister, there are times when I have to cut off an hon. member from the opposition or a private member from the government side who's asking a question, but there are also times when I let them complete a sentence when I see that they're almost ready to wrap up. Please leave that discretion with the chair; otherwise, we're going to have to have a sharp guillotine that none of you are going to enjoy.

Thank you. Let us move on now.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Evening Sittings

21. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2013 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to SO 4(1) this is not a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2013 supplementary supply estimates. When supplementary estimates are tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that a new or amended fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, the 2012-13 supplementary estimates include an amended 2012-13 fiscal plan. The 2012-13 supplementary estimates will provide additional spending for five government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$401 million in expenses, \$55 million in capital investment, and \$77.5 million in nonbudgetary disbursements of the government.

Government Motions

(continued)

22. Mr. Horner moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2012-13 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

23. Mr. Horner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2012-13 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for three hours on Wednesday, March 6, 2013.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Amendments to Standing Orders

24. Mr. Hancock moved:
A Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective May 28, 2012, be amended as follows:

1. Standing Order 7 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1) by striking out "Projected Government Business (Thursday)",
 - (b) by striking out suborder (6).
2. Standing Order 8 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (2.1) On Thursday afternoon no later than the time of adjournment, the Government House Leader shall provide notice to the Clerk of projected Government

- business to be brought before the Assembly in the next week, which shall be published in the Order Paper for the next sitting day.
3. Standing Order 52(1) is amended
 - (a) in clause (a) by striking out "21" and substituting "18";
 - (b) in clause (b) by striking out "21" and substituting "18";
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out "21" and substituting "18".
4. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) by striking out "25" and substituting "18";
 - (b) in clause (b) by striking out "Aboriginal Relations,";
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out "and Energy" and substituting "Energy and Aboriginal Relations".
5. Standing Order 57 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1) by striking out all the words that follow "except" and substituting the following:
 - (a) as provided for under Standing Order 59.01, or
 - (b) with leave of the Assembly.
 - (b) in suborder (2) by striking out "suborder (1)" and substituting "suborder (1)(b)".
6. Standing Order 59.01 is amended
 - (a) by striking out suborders (1) to (4) and substituting the following:
 - 59.01(1) Following the Budget Address, the main estimates of the ministries shall stand referred to the Legislative Policy Committees according to their respective mandates.
 - (2) The estimates of the Executive Council shall stand referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.
 - (3) At any time following the announcement of the date of the Budget Address and no later than 3 sitting days following the Budget Address, the Legislative Policy Committees shall meet to determine a proposed schedule for consideration of the ministries' estimates that stand referred to them.
 - (4) Following the meetings held pursuant to suborder (3), the chairs of the Legislative Policy Committees shall provide the proposed schedules to the Government House Leader, who shall then finalize the schedule for consideration of main estimates, and such schedule shall be tabled by the Government House Leader in the Assembly no later than the Thursday preceding the first meeting scheduled for estimates consideration and shall be published in the Order Paper for the next sitting day.
 - (5) The schedule for consideration of the main estimates shall be subject to the following requirements:
 - (a) Legislative Policy Committees may only meet at the following times:
 - (i) on Monday evenings from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
 - (ii) on Tuesdays from 8 a.m. to noon

- 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- (iii) on Wednesdays from
8 a.m. to noon
3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- (iv) on Thursdays from
8 a.m. to noon
- (b) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the completion of the daily routine and all matters arising in connection with the routine, to allow for Legislative Policy Committees to meet for estimates consideration unless the Government House Leader, upon one sitting day's notice, advises the Assembly that the Assembly must meet beyond the daily routine to deal with Government business and the remaining meetings to consider estimates and the date for the vote shall be rescheduled as necessary;
- (c) on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Legislative Policy Committees may commence estimates consideration notwithstanding that the Assembly has not completed the daily routine and if a vote is called in the Assembly, a Committee shall recess to allow Members to attend to vote;
- (d) the estimates for a ministry shall be considered for a minimum of 2 hours to a maximum of 6 hours;
- (e) the estimates of the Executive Council shall be considered for a maximum of 2 hours;
- (f) no more than 2 Legislative Policy Committees shall be scheduled to consider estimates at the same time.
- (6) Subject to suborder (7), a Legislative Policy Committee shall consider estimates in the following manner:
- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (d) for the next 20 minutes, the member of the fourth party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private Members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) any Member may speak thereafter.
- (7) If a ministry's estimates are scheduled to be considered for fewer than 3 hours, the speaking times in suborder (6) shall be adjusted proportionately subject to any other decision of the committee.
- (b) by renumbering suborders (5), (6) and (7) as suborders (8), (9) and (10), respectively;
- (c) by adding the following after suborder (10):
(11) During the period that main estimates stand referred to the Legislative Policy Committees, such period commencing the first day that estimates are scheduled for consideration and ending when the final vote in Committee of Supply occurs, these Committees shall not meet to consider any other matter nor shall any other committee of the Assembly meet during this period, unless otherwise ordered by the Assembly.
7. Standing Order 59.02 is amended
- (a) by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:
59.02(1) The Standing Orders of the Assembly shall be observed in the consideration of estimates except as follows:
- (a) during consideration of interim or supplementary estimates, the rotation outlined in Standing Order 59.01(6) shall apply;
- (b) all speaking times are limited to 10 minutes at one time during the rotation outlined in Standing Order 59.01(6)(a) to (e);
- (c) all subsequent speaking times are limited to 5 minutes at one time;
- (d) a Member may speak more than once.
- (b) in suborder (2)
- (i) by adding "or (c)" after "suborder (1)(b)", and
- (ii) by striking out "for a total of 20 minutes";
- (c) in suborder (3)(a) by adding "or to respond to questions from the Committee at the request of the Minister during main estimates consideration" before "and".
8. Standing Order 59.03 is amended
- (a) in suborder (1)
- (i) in clause (a) by striking out "Standing Order 59.01(6)" and substituting "Standing Order 59.01(9)",
- (ii) in clause (b) by
- (A) striking out "department" and substituting "ministry",
- (B) striking out "department's" and substituting "ministry's", and
- (C) striking out "departments" and substituting "ministries",
- (b) in suborder (2) by striking out "Standing Order 59.01(6)" and substituting "Standing Order 59.01(9)",
- (c) by striking out suborder (4) and substituting the following:

- (4) On the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates, if the vote has not been taken earlier, the Chair shall interrupt the proceedings at
- (a) one hour before the normal adjournment hour as defined in Standing Order 64(1)(b) if the vote is scheduled for an afternoon sitting, or
 - (b) 9 p.m. if the vote is scheduled for an evening sitting,
- and, if required, Committee of Supply shall be called and the Legislative Policy Committee Chairs shall report without question put and then voting on the main estimates shall proceed.
- (d) by adding the following after suborder (6):
- (7) Following the Committee of Supply's report to the Assembly on the main estimates, the Assembly shall immediately revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation Bill.
9. Standing Order 61 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- 61(1) Interim and supplementary estimates shall be considered for not less than 3 hours.
- (2) A member of the Executive Council may, with at least one day's notice, make a motion to determine
- (a) when Committee of Supply may be called to consider interim or supplementary estimates, and
 - (b) the amount of time for consideration,
- and such questions shall be decided without debate or amendment.
- (3) Following the Committee of Supply's report on interim or supplementary estimates, the Assembly shall immediately revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation Bill.
10. Standing Order 64 is amended by adding the following after suborder (5):
- (6) If more than one appropriation Bill is moved for second or third reading in the Assembly or considered by the Committee of the Whole on any day, and the Bills are at different stages, the questions on the appropriation Bills shall be put in the following order:
- (a) Committee of the Whole;
 - (b) second reading;
 - (c) third reading.
11. Standing Order 89 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- Publication of time limits
- 89 When the sessional calendar is published under Standing Order 3, the Clerk of the Assembly shall publish a notice stating the day that the time limit for receiving private Bills will expire
- (a) on the Legislative Assembly website, and
 - (b) once a week for 2 consecutive weeks in every daily newspaper published in Alberta.
12. Standing Order 91(1) is amended
- (a) by striking out clause (a),
 - (b) in clause (b) by striking out "the session" and substituting "the sitting in which the petition will be presented".
13. Standing Order 92 is amended by striking out "\$200" and substituting "\$500".

14. Standing Order 94(2) is amended by striking out "following the opening day of the session" and substituting "following the first day of the first sitting in any year".

Transitional - Petitions for Private Bills

15. In 2013, notwithstanding Standing Order 94(2), the Clerk shall publish a notice as outlined in Standing Order 89 that sets the time limit to 30 days following the date this motion takes effect.
- B Be it further resolved that the amendments in this motion come into force on passage.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This standing order is necessary to help us proceed with, essentially, the process following the budget. There are a few minor pieces in there which I would point out. Subsections A(1) and A(2) deal with simply removing the Routine called Projected Government Business (Thursday) and then provide that that projected government business will be supplied to the Clerk's office and printed in the Order Paper. That's basically an unnecessary process that we go through every week.

We also in subsection A(3) reduce the number of members on standing committees from 21 to 18. There are three standing committees that had 21 members, and we're asking that they be reduced to 18.

Subsection (4) does the same thing by changing the size of the legislative policy committees from 25 members to 18 members and by moving the responsibility for the Department of Aboriginal Relations from Alberta's Economic Future Committee to the Resource Stewardship Committee.

Those are our processes, and I think everybody would agree with those. We've had some conversation around those in the past. We started with 25 members on the committees and 21 members on the committees in the interest of ensuring that every member of the opposition had an opportunity to be on one of the committees, but I think everybody agrees that the sizes of those committees are too large to be appropriately functional. With the substitution rules that we have, any member who wants to participate – first of all, any member can attend. They now by protocol get notice of all the meetings. Any member that wants to attend a committee meeting can, and they can participate in those meetings but for moving motions and voting. If they want to participate by moving motions and voting, the substitution rules allow that rather well. Those are fairly routine pieces.

The meat of this motion is really about the procedure for estimates. Members will recall that in the standing orders as they're printed now, every department goes to either a legislative policy committee or the Committee of Supply essentially for three hours. It doesn't matter whether there's \$12 billion in the budget or \$1 million although I guess there are none with \$1 million but maybe \$30 million or \$60 million; they go for the same time to committee. Opposition House leaders and I have talked over the years about how we could do it better, how we could allocate more time for larger departments, how we could ensure that there's enough time.

Also, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we're cognizant of is that now there's a fewer number of ministries. We've gone down now to essentially what would be 18 ministries, including Executive Council. Under the old rules that would only allow for 54 hours of consideration of estimates. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Centre for one has always argued that there ought to be more time, not less, for the consideration of estimates. In acquiescence to her desire to continue with a lot of time for the appropriate consideration of estimates, we're proposing here that,

in fact, all estimates go to the legislative policy committees, including the Executive Council estimates.

The legislative policy committees can determine the length of time for each ministry, a minimum of two hours and a maximum of six hours. We've tried to create the greatest possible latitude in the standing orders for the scheduling of meetings: not Monday mornings because members are arriving from across the province to attend, and there are other things that need to be done on Monday mornings; not Thursday afternoons because, as we determined a number of years ago, we want to get back to the constituencies to have an opportunity to be there to consult with our constituents on Fridays and over the weekends, and for some travelling, clearly, they can't make their travel arrangements if we have a late or even a normal adjournment hour of 6 o'clock on Thursdays. So not providing for scheduling on Monday mornings or Thursday afternoons, but otherwise during the week every available time could be made available, including adjourning the House right after the Routine to allow the LPC to sit and meet and consider estimates provides the greatest amount of flexibility for scheduling.

We will still have a horrendous job – and it is a horrendous job – of sitting down, first of all, with the House leaders in the opposition to look at what is the art of the possible and then to consult with the legislative policy committees, which is a new step and one that I embark upon with some trepidation as I'm reminded eloquently from time to time by, again, the Member for Edmonton-Centre that that creates some difficulties in the process. But I think it's important. We've said that the legislative policy committees, the all-party committees of the House, have an important role. One of their important roles should be to own their agenda. That means they should have a say in the setting of the agenda. That is the purport of (6) in the proposal. It's really to set up the maximum possible times. I can tell you that I've heard from the House leaders opposite that they're not particularly interested – in fact, I would think they stated it a little bit more strongly – in morning meetings. I understand that.

We've always been reluctant to schedule two committees at a time, but we also have to determine an appropriate length of time to deal with the budget estimates and get appropriation acts passed on a timely basis. Our hope would be to do that this year by the end of April. So within that time frame we have the latitude to schedule the estimates. We'll work with the opposition to schedule them. We won't be pleasing everybody all the time, but we will do our very best to make it a palatable approach and one which gives primacy to the idea that we should spend the time necessary to appropriately examine our estimates, to hear the ideas that might come forward – and I'm sure there are some good ideas – as to how we could do better with them, and then follow through on that.

3:20

Because estimates are so important and because it is hard work – and I wouldn't want anybody in the public that may be listening right now to think that this is not hard work. The estimates are a heavy read, and getting in behind them is heavy work. So we're saying in these amendments that other committees shouldn't meet while estimates are being considered. We should be able to have members focus their attention on the estimates and not have to be running off to other legislative committees at that time. I think there's a proviso there that allows something to happen in an emergency.

By the same token, while we're talking about the House adjourning after the Routine each day to allow LPCs to meet in the afternoons, to provide more time for that, we do reserve the

right, on appropriate notice, to call for government business in an afternoon and evening and, if we do, to then make appropriate adjustments to the schedule.

We've asked that Standing Order 59.03 be amended to allow for greater participation by officials in the estimates process. Normally, in fact, in Committee of Supply ministers are there and respond to the questions. Then we changed the rules to allow officials to come in so that answers could be more complete, and then we changed the rules to allow the opposition to bring someone in to assist them with it. We want to take this one step further and say that where appropriate, officials can answer the questions. It's an appropriate addition because the concept here is to get the best information out and to appropriately respond to questions.

That's the meat and substance of this. It does provide that there are issues with respect to the Appropriation Act. The Appropriation Act has usually been interpreted in an appropriate way, but if there are two competing appropriation acts on any given day, the question has always been: "If one gets voted, what happens? Do you pass the time to vote the other one?" This provides clarity that they're voted in succession.

The vote would remain exactly the way it is in the standing orders now, where amendments could be moved in legislative policy committees but not voted. The legislative policy committee reports are reported with any amendments to the Committee of Supply. We then vote on the estimates by voting on any proposed amendments first, any so-called pullouts that any member has decided they want to be voted on separately, and then a rollout vote of the rest. What is in the standing orders here is sort of a clarification of the time, whether it's in the afternoon or the evening, when that vote will be held if it hasn't been previously called on the day it's been scheduled.

Then a little piece here, and I have to admit to it being somewhat personal. After the Committee of Supply reports to the Legislative Assembly that the estimates have been considered, we amend the standing orders to allow for an automatic reversion to Introduction of Bills. Now, I'll have to admit that we used to do this as a matter of practice. We used to ask for unanimous consent of the House every time for reversion to Introduction of Bills so you could introduce the Appropriation Act following the report of the Committee of Supply.

I forget what the incident was where I earned the umbrage of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but I will take full responsibility for the fact that I did something which caused her to be mad at me and promise that she would never again give unanimous consent, and she hasn't. She has kept her word. She has not given unanimous consent ever since that point to reversion to Introduction of Bills. However, it's time that we moved past the individual personalities of the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for the better good of the province and put in here that we can revert to Introduction of Bills so that the Appropriation Act can come in and be passed on a timely basis. So that's a little story for the record but one that I think is important to point out, that's it not just me with a heavy stick. It's really for the good of Alberta that we do these things.

Then there is a provision for the interim supply estimates, just clearing up that the time in which they are to be determined is not less than three hours but an amount of time that's actually set in the motion. That's because we have some practice of having it shorter if they're smaller and more than one day, as it used to be called, for larger ones.

Then a piece in the proposal, in the amendment, Mr. Speaker, allows for moving ahead with private bills. Members will know

that under our current standing orders at the beginning of every new session there's a time set by the Clerk for receiving petitions for private bills. This year we're not starting a new session, so there's no opportunity for members of the public who wish to have a private bill to petition for one. So we wish to make a change there because that's an unintended consequence of not having a new session, to allow in each year that time period to be started whether a new session starts or not so that private bills can come forward. We don't have that many every year, and some years we don't have any at all, but as long as we have that privilege in our precincts to allow that, we should give people the opportunity to do that. There are, I think, two or three waiting in the wings to come forward this year. So that would be the end part of the session.

Of course – and I have to blame this on the Clerk's office, Mr. Speaker – for the last three years, at least, maybe four, they've been wanting to raise the fees. The last part in that does allow for the raising of the fees. They haven't been raised for I don't know how many years, maybe 20. I'm not sure that's the right number. But for a long, long time fees for private bills have not been raised. There's considerable work that goes into them in the Clerk's office. It was seen appropriate. This was the appropriate time for the Clerk's office to win that particular argument and have included in the standing orders the increase of fees.

It goes on further to provide that the amendments, Mr. Speaker, would come into force on passage, and that's, of course, so that we can immediately utilize them following the delivery of what I know will be a fantastic budget for Alberta on Thursday.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the courtesy extended to me by the Official Opposition in allowing me to come in front of them in order to present some support and a few suggestions to make this Government Motion 24 better. The standing orders, as everybody knows and loves, are the rules that we all agree to work by. It is the smallest book that we have in our arsenal. These are our rules. We develop them. We agree to work by them. So changing them is important. I have in my time seen two major rewrites and about a dozen minor rewrites of these.

I do want to say that the Government House Leader is very kind in crediting me with a number of things. Perhaps I should just be credited with being annoying enough that he feels he has to change things. I prefer to see it as that I am upholding democracy and making sure that we continue to allow the government to have enough days in session to be as transparent as they would like to be. Isn't that generous of me? There we go.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

There are a number of very good suggestions here in Government Motion 24. The idea that we would get rid of the necessity of the somewhat archaic point of having the Official Opposition House Leader stand and formally ask for what the projected business would be: you know, we can do that now electronically and in a number of other ways of sharing information.

I am particularly pleased to see the opportunity to improve our budget system. I had reached the point, quite frankly, after last year that I wasn't going to participate in budget debates anymore because they were so useless. I know that's crushing news to the

Government House Leader, but honestly they just weren't. The format of them wasn't working.

3:30

The fact that we would debate the Department of Health, that had a budget of \$9 billion and a number of complex departments under it, for the same amount of time as we would debate any number of other ministries that had much smaller budgets or much simpler components underneath them just didn't make sense to me. We have been able to agree amongst the House leaders that we would in fact look for ways in which we could spend more time on the more complex and higher budget ministries than on some others, and I'm pleased that we have been able to get that far.

I do have some concerns with some of the things that have been raised, and ever looking forward to improving our experience in this House, I do have an amendment to Motion 24 – it's at the table now – if we could pause for a moment and have it distributed to the members.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We will pause for a moment while those papers are handed out.

You may now proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I have noticed some tendencies from the government over the last number of years while I've been working with the standing orders, and I am trying to dampen the government's enthusiasm for those tendencies because I think that ultimately they do not serve this Assembly well. I know that it's an inconceivable thought by hon. members opposite in the government, but honestly, if they had to consider some of the standing orders and some of the proposed changes as having to work under them as opposition members, they wouldn't be quite so keen to have them passed. I'm just looking out for the best possible for you. In case you ever do end up in opposition, I will have made it a little less difficult if you will support me by passing my amendments.

One of the tendencies that I have seen is an increase in the sitting times per day but a steady decline in the number of days that we are actually here in the Assembly. For those of you that are keeping track, fewer days in this Assembly is fewer question periods in this Assembly. So, again, in trying to help the hon. members in the government be as transparent as they say that they'd like to be, the more question periods that are provided to them, the better off they will be, and the better off we will all be. I'm trying to stop that tendency to shrink the number of sitting days in a session.

The other tendency I've noticed is an increasing number of motions which the government puts forward that cannot be debated. We've already had a couple here this afternoon; for example, the evening sittings. Well, that's now worded in such a way that when the Government House Leader introduces a motion that we will have evening sittings, it goes to a vote without debate. So we're no longer able to talk about this, how it affects our families, how it affects our ability to do our work, or anything else because it's another motion that under the standing orders goes to a vote without debate, and I don't think that's the best thing for democracy.

One of the final points I wanted to make is that although I appreciate and I think it's helped all of us to have staff on the floor with us during the estimates debates, I have one hesitation. I will call it – I can say the name of someone who used to be here, right? – the memorial Gary Mar concern. When Mr. Mar was a minister of the Crown and I used to appear opposite him in Public

Accounts, he was not keen on being there, I'll admit. We were kind of stuck because if he wasn't there to answer the question, nothing could happen because we weren't allowed to question his staff. That's moved a long way now. We can now have staff on the floor to assist ministers. But what I don't want to see is the point where the minister disappears entirely, which our former colleague was wont to do, wander off to the back and get on his cellphone and indulge in whatever goodies were backstage there. Just my little request that we not end up with that kind of a situation happening, in honour of that particular minister's behaviour in the past.

Now, let me go to the amendment to Motion 24 which has been brought before us. I'll go through the sections that I've got here and tell you why I've asked for this.

Ms Blakeman moved that the motion be amended in Part A as follows:

- A. Section 2 is amended in the proposed Standing Order 8(2.1) by striking out "provide notice to the Clerk" and substituting "provide written notice to the Clerk and all House Leaders".
- B. Section 5 is struck out.
- C. Section 6(a) is amended in the proposed Standing Order 59.01
 - (a) by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 - (3) Following the announcement of the date of the Budget Address, but no later than the date of the Budget Address, the House Leaders shall prepare a proposed schedule for consideration of the estimates by the Legislative Policy Committees and shall transmit that schedule to the chairs of those committees.
 - (3.1) Following the receipt of the proposed schedule under suborder (3), but no later than 3 sitting days following the Budget Address, the Legislative Policy Committees shall meet to consider and, if required, make changes to the proposed schedule for consideration of the ministries' estimates that stand referred to them.
 - (3.2) If the House Leaders are unable to reach an agreement on the proposed schedule under suborder (3), the Legislative Policy Committees shall prepare the proposed schedule for consideration of the ministries' estimates that stand referred to them.
 - (b) in suborder (4) by striking out "suborder (3)" and substituting "suborder (3.1)".
 - (c) in suborder (5)
 - (i) in clause (a) in subclauses (ii), (iii) and (iv) by striking out "8 a.m. to noon" wherever it occurs, and
 - (ii) by striking out clause (c).
- D. Section 8 is amended by striking out clause (d).
- E. Section 9 is amended in the proposed Standing Order 61
 - (a) by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:
 - (1) Subject to suborder (1.1), interim and supplementary estimates shall be considered for not less than 3 hours.
 - (1.1) When supplementary estimates
 - (a) total more than \$1 billion, or
 - (b) affect 8 or more ministries,
 the estimates shall be considered for not less than 6 hours.
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3).

The first section, A – forgive me for this because you've got to kind of follow along like one of those complicated agendas. My sections A, B, C, D, and E are the sections in order to note what I've done here, but if you read on, section 2 is actually what you will find on the outside of the Standing Orders as they appear in your Order Paper, okay?

Section 2 is amended in the proposed Standing Order 8(2.1) by striking out "provide notice to the Clerk" and substituting "provide written notice to the Clerk and all House Leaders." The reason I've done this is just to clarify. We stated earlier that we really didn't need to have the Official Opposition House Leader standing up and asking the government to reel off into *Hansard*, just to stand there and do it, frankly, the projected government business. Fair enough. But the way Motion 24 was written to refer to this is that information would be provided to the Clerk.

I just wanted to clarify that that information would be provided to the House leaders so that we can then work with our staff and our MLAs to make sure that we've got it soon enough. I didn't want to see a situation happen where information went to the Clerk, it turns up in the Order Paper, but we don't get an early Order Paper; we see one Monday morning. Tough to schedule your colleagues when the first time you hear about the projected government business is Monday morning. This was just an amendment to make sure that the House leaders would also get the written information and would get it on the Thursday that we're in here, a small change but an important one for opposition members.

Section B is striking out section 5 completely, and that is section 57 in our standing orders. Now, Standing Order 57 is a long-held tradition of this Assembly, and it says that when the Assembly is in and sitting, no other committee may meet. You think: well, what's the big deal? Well, it is a big deal. We're all in here, in the Assembly, to do the work of our constituents, and it's difficult at times to do the work of our constituents if there's business going on in the Assembly and you are required to be sitting in a committee that is meeting somewhere else. So we've always had a rule: no other committees when the Assembly is sitting.

We've had occasions where we've done all-nighters, and it comes around to Wednesday morning. It gets close to the 8:30 time, when Public Accounts is going to start, and Public Accounts can't happen because the Assembly is still sitting, and neither should it happen because we want the full attention of members to be on the Assembly. The Assembly trumps the committees, in other words.

What I don't want to see is a situation where the Assembly is meeting and we're sending people out of here and off to do work in committees. That is not a good idea, as far as I'm concerned. It splits the focus of people, and frankly we can't all do the good job that we came here to do on behalf of our constituents and on behalf of Albertans.

I have asked for that section to be struck out. It's a section that is being amended to say that the LPCs, the legislative policy committees, which are doing our budget estimates, could meet at the same time as the Assembly is in.

3:40

There's a second point later on, where it talks about if the business of the Assembly is still continuing – for example, if we went past the usual time because we had a point of privilege or a Standing Order 30 emergency debate – again, this would allow the LPCs to go off and start. I just don't think that should be allowed. I don't think that's in all of our best interests.

Interestingly enough, it also allows the government to continue to shorten the time that we sit. So aside from the conflict that is created and a lack of attention on the business of the House, it also manages to get two things done at the same time and shorten our total sitting time.

Section C, which is amending 6(a) in Government Motion 24, which in turn amends Standing Order 59.01, is really about how we negotiate the schedule of the budget debates. I wanted to make sure here that we didn't do something unfair to the committees, and that is just kind of dump on them: "Okay, you guys. Go off and figure out the time schedule." I've sat in enough of these committees where we all struggle with our electronic devices to even organize the next meeting of the committee, and most times it ends up being deferred to the clerk, who has to do some sort of straw poll, a call-out to all the members to find out when the members of the committee can get together for the next committee meeting. Oh, my Lord, can you imagine having to try and organize a budget debate of all of the departments of the government, doing that at a committee? It's just not fair to do that to the people that are on that committee.

What I proposed was that the House leaders together would present a schedule in a certain timing to the LPCs. The LPCs would be able to pretty much review it and just make sure that we hadn't, you know, gone astray for some reason. That's not usually going to happen because you've got three opposition parties and the government, and if they can all agree, that's about as good as you're going to get. We also as House leaders make sure that each of our caucuses adheres to the agreement that we've made, so we guarantee that everybody will pull along behind it.

That's what I've done here, just adjusted it a little bit to present it to the LPC. The LPC can review it, change it if they need to, and then if we can't agree, it goes to the LPC to do the best they can. In the end, it all goes back to the Government House Leader because it's about that time that some of our beloved ministers remember that, oh, indeed, they had been scheduled to be in Berlin, so no, they couldn't do it that day, and could we please rearrange the whole schedule for them? That then gets punted into the lap of the Government House Leader, and good luck to him. That's what we're trying to do.

Thank you, by the way, for reducing the size of those committees. Twenty-five people was just unworkable, and we're down to 18, I think, in most cases.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt you, but I neglected to give your amendment a name. Just for the record we will call your amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and I would like to move acceptance by everyone in the Assembly of amendment A1, which is an amendment to Government Motion 24 as appearing on the Order Paper. Thank you so much.

Just continuing on with the amendments that I have in front of you here, section (b) is amending suborder (4) by striking out "suborder (3)." That's really just a renumbering to make sure that the reference that appears in the next section is actually referring to the right thing now.

Section (c), suborder (5). Oh, boy, this is complicated. You can see why I would really feel bad about putting all of this in front of a committee.

Standing Order 59.01. Okay. How could I have missed this? I believe that we all work hard. I do. No matter whether you're urban or rural, you're in the government or not, I think we work hard. What's interesting is that we have a better sense on the

opposition sides of what the government's kind of schedule is and where your heavy load is. For some reason the government just never quite clicks into the fact that for opposition members morning is a heavy workload. That's when we get a lot of the stuff done that you see now. So to propose that we would meet in these legislative policy committees to debate budgets from 8 a.m. to noon and then from 3:30 to 6:30 and then from 7 to 10, aside from the fact that I'm sure there are child labour laws that don't allow that somewhere, not that we're children: we can't do that. We just can't.

I didn't want it to sit in there. I mean, your Government House Leader is a good man and would not abuse this, but I didn't want it to sit there in case it might be used by an evil twin in some years in the future. I think we should just strike it out and not leave it lying about to be tumbled over by somebody in the future.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Finally, the second part that I was talking about, where the legislative policy committees may commence consideration notwithstanding that we're still sitting in the House, and the final bit turns up in section 8, and that is about departments and ministries – oh, it's the last piece. Okay. If the minister calls this the Laurie Blakeman memorial amendment because I wouldn't give him unanimous consent, this is not right, and the member knows it's not right. We have a long-standing tradition in this Assembly that money bills get four days: first reading, second reading, Committee of the Whole, third reading. They get four days, and you cannot introduce an appropriation bill until you have voted on the estimates. This ends up putting them together. No, no, no. Tsk, tsk, tsk. It is queue-jumping, and once more, folks, if you're paying attention, it cuts one more day off the number that we're here. I know that those members present on the other side desperately need that additional day to be transparent in question period, and I'm helping them with that.

Finally, the last section, section 9, is what I call the Laurie Blakeman memorial amendment. I have always said that if we are looking at a supplementary supply in which more than a billion dollars is being considered or more than eight ministries are under examination, we should have more than three hours to do it. So my final section in the amending motion is to make sure that if that is the case, we would have a minimum of six hours to debate in Committee of Supply. Some of you happily have not been here when we've had to do that, but honestly I have had supplementary supply budgets of well over a billion dollars with up to 14 ministries being debated, and you've got three hours. I mean, nobody, even the chipmunk singing family, can talk fast enough and get questions out of government fast enough, so it does no one a service.

Those are the amendments that I am proposing. I believe that they're all reasonable. I've kidded you a bit about some of things I've proposed. I do really support the Government House Leader for the work that he's done here, but I am making those suggestions because I think it will result in the best rules for us all to agree to work by, to make it the most fair to members of the opposition, and because a good opposition makes a good government. There's nothing in these amendments that should scare anybody over there. I'm not pulling any fast ones. It's all pretty easy to look at. I would ask that you support me in this amendment to the Government House Leader's Motion 24.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I look forward to your support.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anderson: Hi, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to refer to *Beauchesne's* 688, on page 205. We've done this traditionally. Where we have something like this, where we have a motion with multiple parts in it, we sever the vote so that we're voting on each individual one because there are ones in here – and I'll get to my comments in a moment, but could we have that courtesy extended to us so that when we vote on this, we could vote on each of the different sections in amendment A1? Would that be appropriate for us to do?

3:50

The Speaker: It's certainly okay by the chair. Let me seek the consent of the House on it because this is a very complicated motion with many parts to it, and the amendment approaches it from a similar standpoint. Is anyone objecting to that? If not, let's just do it that way. We'll debate the amendment and then the motion as amended, or not, in its entirety, but we'll come to the vote, and we'll do it section by section if that's the wish of the House. Let's do the amendment first. You're asking about the amendment first, right? Are we agreed with that, then?

Ms Blakeman: To vote the amendment separately.

The Speaker: Yes. We'll deal with the amendment in that fashion, then.

Mr. Anderson: Right. Sorry. The amendment, not the motion.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: I'd like to speak to this amendment and the motion generally but certainly the amendment. I have mixed feelings about this motion for several reasons. I am very happy with the idea that we as opposition House leaders and the Government House Leader sit down and go through the standing orders and talk about the standing orders on a semiregular basis, anyway, not always all of them but certain parts of them virtually every time we meet, or most times that we meet, and talk about ways that we can improve the business of this House and how we conduct our affairs here in the Legislature to be more parliamentary and to allow for better debate and hopefully better serve the people of Alberta's interests. I'd like to thank the Government House Leader for that opportunity. I think that there are some very good things in this particular motion that is addressed by this amendment.

The problem is that although a lot of these things have been discussed and agreed to by the opposition, several of them have not been agreed to. It's a little disconcerting because they're actually pretty important pieces. It's a little bit frustrating because we do have these meetings, and they're enjoyable meetings, but I sometimes feel we come out of these meetings and I think we're on the same page until I see the Order Paper, and then I realize that maybe we weren't on the same page after all. So I do have some concerns.

One of the concerns I have – and this amendment does address it – is the issue of morning sessions. I've had the opportunity to be both in government for a couple of years and in opposition for three years now, and I can tell you that the morning period of time is a very different time. Mr. Speaker, you've had this opportunity, as well. You know that it's different for an opposition party in the morning. We have to prepare many, many questions every single

day. We have to caucus about our strategy on a day-to-day basis as an entire caucus because, unlike the government, who can plan things in advance and ramp things up when it's time, as an opposition we have to react on a day-to-day basis to what's going on and what the government is putting forward and so forth.

The morning time. You know, I know the staff start our day at about 6 a.m., a couple of them even earlier than that, but it's about 6 a.m., 7 a.m. Most of the MLAs are in there by 7 or 7:30 a.m., and we immediately go to into a strategy session, a caucus session on what questions we're going to ask, what members' statements we're going to make, what press releases we're going to put out: all these different things. Then we put that plan into place, and then basically from 10 to 1 we are just madly getting ready writing and editing and practising and doing all the things that opposition members need to do to do their job effectively.

The problem with putting estimates from that 8 a.m. to noon period is that it really does cut into that preparation time. It's very unfair. It's an unfair advantage for the government. The government hitherto has been very good at giving us that time in the morning.

We do meet for Public Accounts in the morning. That's the one committee that does sit in the morning regularly. That's for several reasons. Ideally, that would be changed, too, but nonetheless it is what it is. As chair of that committee I'm going to respect the tradition. Ideally, it would be changed, but because we want to have access to departmental staff on a week-to-week basis every single week during session – and, of course, most staff go home at 5 o'clock or 4:30 – it's not really practical to have entire staffs coming into Public Accounts after hours, which is what would be needed in a lot of cases.

So we do have some exceptions to that, but generally speaking we don't get into the habit of taking up the time of opposition parties in the morning and interfering with their work. This motion doesn't do that, but it allows for it to happen. It gives the option of it to happen.

I think that this amendment, specifically clause C(c)(i), is very appropriate and absolutely should be voted in favour of by this Assembly. Let's just take that off the table. We don't like these all-night sittings. I don't think anybody likes it when we go all the way to 10 p.m. It rushes the work. I agree with my colleagues in the opposition that it's unnecessary. We get paid a handsome amount of money to sit in this Assembly, and we should be able to work, you know, certainly from the first week of February to, you would think, mid- to the end of June and just work sane hours during that period of time before we break for summer instead of piling everything up like we do. We haven't done that for a while. We've had night sittings for a long time, so I don't argue at this point with the fact of doing estimates in the evening like this.

I would argue completely with any move that a legislative committee made or the House leaders made in this regard to put concurrent sittings together. That's when you have two estimates going on at the same time. The Official Opposition probably can handle that. It's not easy, but we can handle it. It is grossly unfair to the third and fourth parties. Grossly unfair. I have complete empathy for them on that because I went through that as a member of a four-member caucus previous to the last election. It's not a fun thing, and it's not a fair thing to do.

We obviously have our views on the budget and come at things a certain way as the Wildrose caucus. The Liberal and ND caucuses obviously come at it from a different viewpoint, and they shouldn't be forced into a situation where with a very small, small research staff and four or five members they're having to deal with two concurrent committees. That's just not fair, and it's not appropriate. Forcing the opposition to do that should be below the

members on the other side if they truly do believe in transparency, accountability, and fairness. I hope that they will make sure that they do not use the discretion that these orders give them to do concurrent sittings for estimates and having two committees meet at the same time or mornings.

Now, one thing I didn't see in here, Mr. Speaker – and that was also disappointing – is that we as opposition asked the members opposite to consider extending the time that we sit on Thursdays, even for just half an hour, so that we could do some of the estimates on Thursday afternoons. For some reason that did not make it into this motion. I thought it would at least be an option. It hasn't been. I don't understand that.

I come from around the Calgary area, obviously Airdrie. It's a long drive home. It's longer for many others. I do think that because it's estimates, not everyone has to be at estimates, just the people on the committees. Surely we could delay it a half an hour before we go home on Thursday and work till 5 or – who knows? – maybe even 6 one or two days. That wouldn't be the end of the world, and it would allow the government to achieve their goals of getting through the estimates at an even quicker pace without interfering with morning estimates or with the morning routine of the opposition parties or caucuses. I think that's a very reasonable request, so I urge the government – hopefully, we can convince them in future days here – to add another motion that would allow for that. It's half an hour we're talking about, but it would shorten the session because we could put a lot of two-hour estimates into those Thursday slots. Therefore, we wouldn't have to put them somewhere else. It would make a lot of sense to do that. That is certainly one of the issues.

4:00

I do note that the motion says:

- (5) The schedule for consideration of the main estimates shall be subject to the following requirements:
 - (a) Legislative Policy Committees may only meet at the following times.

It says “may.” It doesn't say “must” meet at the following times or “can only” meet at the following times. I'm assuming that the legislative committees, once we get in there, will have some discretion. So I'd ask those chairs, certainly, and we've asked our Wildrose members who are deputy chairs of those committees to not schedule meetings on mornings or to schedule them concurrently one with another. I hope that we as House leaders can help them with that by coming up with some reasonable guidelines or schedules for them to look at as options in making that determination.

Other than that, there was another issue with regard to a troubling piece in here, which is section 6(6), where they talk about how time will be allocated in the estimates. Now, what we've done here – and, again, I think that this is a good thing – is that we've extended the amount of time that we have for estimates, so we can examine some of these larger departments for six hours instead of three. It's still not enough. I mean, we still should be able to examine Health for, certainly, nine to 12 hours. It's 40 per cent of the budget. Certainly, it should get, you know, 15 per cent of the time. Nonetheless, it's an improvement. It's an improvement.

One thing that is disappointing here, though, is that in the first three-hour block the Official Opposition gets one hour to question them. In the second three-hour block for a large ministry the Official Opposition is not given that hour. It's not even given half an hour under this. That's ridiculous. That means that the Official Opposition – and we all, I think, understand the role of the Official Opposition here – will get less than one-third of the time

allocated for the estimates of these departments. That's ridiculous. Really, we should be approaching half of the time, but certainly a third is reasonable. I again hope that the House leaders can come to an agreement on that and allow the Official Opposition at least a compromise so that we have an hour and a half, an hour in the first three hours, half an hour in the second three hours, for those larger ministries. That would be a lot more fair, and that is not addressed.

Those are the main issues, that are addressed in this particular amendment, that I am concerned with as I read this over. I don't like the idea of the legislative committees having to deal with all of the different scheduling and so forth for the various caucuses and putting together the schedules for this. I think it's a lot to ask the chairs and deputy chairs. I would hope that at the very least the House leaders would get together, give some proposal or direction because they're going to be able to know what their caucuses need for time and so forth – I think it would go a lot smoother – rather than just putting it into the legislative committees and saying: go at it. I mean, it would waste a lot of their time, too, just dealing with time allocation and things like that, I would think.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments on this amendment and this motion. I just hope that the Government House Leader will respect these reasonable amendments and support the amendments of the Member for Edmonton-Centre and our ideas as well as we go forward so that we can make this process as smooth as possible without any unnecessary friction between the caucuses on issues where I think we have general agreement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has ceded his spot temporarily to allow Edmonton-Strathcona to go next.

Edmonton-Strathcona, the floor is yours.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to the member.

The Speaker: Pardon me. I'm sorry.

Was there anybody under 29(2)(a)? I didn't see anybody anxious to pursue. None? Okay. Thank you.

Ms Notley: Thank you also to the member from Rimbey for giving me an opportunity to get up and speak on this very important set of amendments to the motion that has been put forward by the Government House Leader.

I want to start, Mr. Speaker, by saying that unlike my other two Opposition House Leader colleagues, who are taking a very reasonable and restrained approach to the motion that's been put before us by the Government House Leader, I am not – I'm sure it will shock people – feeling terribly reasonable or restrained. In fact, the motion that's been put forward by the Government House Leader is indicative to me of a very significant change in – dare I say it? – tone on the part of this government. It is indicative of a decision on the part of this government to use its majority to change the rules to make things work for them as quickly and easily as possible so that they can get out under the cover of darkness as quickly as possible to deal with the many challenges facing their rather old and tired government.

I say this from the perspective of one who has been here for a long time, since 2008. It's like I've been here forever. But I will say that in the previous four years – certainly, the Government House Leader can correct me if I'm wrong – my recollection is that there has only been one time where the government used its

majority to come in with a series of changes to the standing orders where we had not had agreement with the House leaders collectively. Of course, there was always sort of the impending threat that they would do that, but we still managed to find some means of negotiating. Instead, what we've got here is this extremely lengthy and complicated and impactful set of amendments that are coming forward from the Government House Leader in the absence of consensus and, indeed, over the very strenuous objections of all three opposition House leaders. This, Mr. Speaker, is indicative of an overall change of tone. So when the Premier next gets up and begins to complain about tone in the House, she needs to begin by remembering that on this very first afternoon of this very first day of session this year her Government House Leader came in with a whole series of changes to the rules which allow them the discretion to do a whole bunch of stuff faster and to exercise their majority in a way that undermines qualitatively the degree to which members of the opposition can hold this government to account for critical decisions that are made on behalf of the citizens of this province.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that this government has said repeatedly over the last two weeks that this next session is going to be almost entirely about budgeting details. So what do they do? They come in here with a series of changes which give them the potential to actually run six committees a day. Six ministries a day. I mean, they could get us through budgetary debate in three days with the rules that they have just given themselves in this amendment.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Ms Notley: It is quite shameful.

Of course, you know, the Government House Leader will say: "Oh, well, we're still going to sit down with the House leaders although we've now changed the rules so that we don't actually have to do that either. We're still going to sit down and try to make it work, but in fact we've used our majority to give ourselves the discretion to potentially have six ministries a day dealt with in estimates."

The proposals that were put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre are an attempt to change ever so modestly and cautiously and in such a deferential way some of these proposed changes by the Government House Leader so as to limit this damage somewhat. So what is she talking about? Well, first of all, she's suggesting that we should not give the government the authority to have committees sit when we are here in this Assembly otherwise engaged in Assembly business. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we have a right and a responsibility to sit on these committees and to participate in them. To then suggest that we should be doing that at the same time that we're in this House debating other matters is inconsistent. It's irrational. It in effect says to everybody in this House as well as to all Albertans: "We don't care that you elected opposition representatives. We think we've got a plurality, not a majority but a plurality, of the vote. Therefore, we're entitled to make all the decisions we want when and how we want to make them." That's what these rules are doing.

The proposals made by the Member for Edmonton-Centre would simply ensure that we revert to the process that's been in place, I think pretty much forever, that we do not schedule committee meetings at the same time that the House is sitting. Hardly revolutionary what she's proposing. Instead, what she's trying to do is stop the damage.

4:10

Now, the next thing that she outlines is the whole question of the role of the House leaders. I've already talked about how historically House leaders worked together collaboratively, including the Government House Leader, to come up with proposed changes to the standing orders that work for everybody. One of the changes that the Government House Leader wants to make is that the schedule will now be done not by the chair and the vice-chairs, by the way, hon. Official Opposition House Leader. The vice-chairs under these rules are given no authority, no opportunity for input into the scheduling of estimates. Be very clear that this set of rules sets out that it will be the government chairs of the committees who will make the decisions about people's schedules, not the vice-chairs. So no role at all for the opposition in the process through which we schedule the budget. And, just to review, if this goes forward, they are going to give themselves the opportunity to have six ministries a day considered.

My experience in committees as well has changed. I would like to say evolved, but it's definitely not the case. It has devolved over the course of the last five years as a sitting member of this House. When I first got elected, it was the case that committee chairs were quite respectful of the opposition members on committees and attempted to schedule meetings in a way that understood and reflected the relatively small nature of the opposition and the need for opposition members to be able to attend committee meetings.

Since the election of the new Premier that ethos has changed. My personal experience is that I have come up against committee chairs repeatedly saying: "No. This is when we've set it. Sorry." There's no opportunity to talk to opposition members or for opposition members to say if they're available or not. That's been my experience in the last year under the new Premier, so there's no reason for me to believe that this process that the Government House Leader is setting out through these rules will be any more respectful of our situation.

Now, the hon. Official Opposition House Leader made the obvious point. Depending on the size of your caucus, this becomes more or less onerous, more or less difficult to meet your obligations as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I was a member of a two-person caucus from 2008 to 2012, and at that time it was possible. We negotiated with good faith, we scheduled things with good faith, and it was possible for a member of our caucus to attend every set of government estimates and to ensure that we were able to participate fully because – you know what? – that's what we were elected to do. The rules that are proposed under the Government House Leader's amendments, if not changed as per the motion put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, will potentially negate what has historically been an ability on the part of our caucus.

To me that's a very clear decision. That's a very clear choice that this government is making. Ultimately, it's a choice that this Premier is making. It is a choice about the quality of debate in this Legislature, the breadth of debate in this Legislature, the opportunity for debate in this Legislature, and the transparency of debate in this Legislature. That is a choice. This particular set of rules, put forward by the Government House Leader, if unamended by the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-Centre put forward, will significantly undermine many of these key principles that I'm talking about.

Now, another thing that the Official Opposition House Leader mentioned as well as the Member for Edmonton-Centre is this notion of a.m. meetings, morning committee meetings.

Now, again, for the years that I've been here, with the exception of Public Accounts it has always been the case that the government has recognized that the daily routine of members, depending on which side of the House that they sit, is different and that opposition members are incredibly busy and incredibly committed in the mornings, before Orders of the Day or the question period rotation begins. That's just the way it is. That is the rotation of the day. They fully understand what that looks like for us. They fully understand our availability in the mornings, and all three opposition House leaders made it very clear to the Government House Leader that under no circumstances did we see this as anything but, quite frankly, a bit of a hostile action, the notion of having budget debate in the morning when we are otherwise and historically always have been very much occupied. Again, it can't be interpreted as anything but a very intentional decision to try and constrain the ability of the opposition to do its job, Mr. Speaker. That's all it can be seen as.

Now, the Government House Leader will say: "Well, we're not necessarily going to do this. We just want to give ourselves the potential in case we can't reach agreement." Well, if you're not going to do it, don't put it in the rules. If you think you might do it, then that's why you put it in the rules. Be very clear. This little set of rules, once we've had a chance, if it passes unamended by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, is going to be a fabulous example for us to trot out of how this government has absolutely no respect for the work being done in this Legislature.

The other matter that is addressed by this motion is the issue of – I'm losing my train of thought again. Gosh. Already. It's like it's, you know, 2 in the morning and we've been here for three months. But no; it's the first day. There is another critical point here, but I just cannot remember offhand what it is.

All of this is to say, though, that this really is a walk back from negotiating with the House leaders. It's a walk back from ensuring that the opposition members are able to participate in a way that gets the best commentary, the best review from them. It's a walk back from working collaboratively going forward with the House leaders. It's a use of their majority to essentially shorten this whole process. That's really what it comes down to, Mr. Speaker. This whole set of rules is designed to limit the amount of time that this government has to spend in the Legislature because it doesn't work well for them. Every time we get into the Legislature, for the increasingly short periods of time that we actually manage to get here, this government does very poorly. Their record, quite frankly, is one which no one could reasonably defend. What this is about is shortening all of that debate.

We as opposition House leaders proposed a schedule that would have extended the time to debate the budget by all of three days. All of three days. It wasn't our first choice. Our first choice was, of course, to actually maybe do one set of budget estimates a day. Heaven forbid, you know, that we actually do it so that the media and the public can keep up with everything that we're doing. We came up with what I thought was a pretty reasonable process. We agreed, heaven forbid, to stay till 6 o'clock on Thursdays. I mean, I know Albertans will be shocked at the horrific conditions that we were prepared to adopt on their behalf. There we were, ready to do that, but apparently the government is just not prepared to accept the idea that people, for the four months of the year that we're actually here, might work in this House until 6 o'clock on Thursdays.

Had we done that, we could get through budget debate in a perfectly reasonable amount of time and leave the government lots of opportunity to have further discussions about legislation should they ever come up with any ideas on that end.

4:20

I urge all members to accept the motion put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Frankly, it's an eminently reasonable compromise to an otherwise almost bullying set of proposals put forward by the government. It is at the very least that. Frankly, if you want to maintain any credibility on issues of democracy, you can't vote it down.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise for the first time in this sitting, and it's a pleasure to be here again as an Official Opposition member. Now, as my colleague first spoke to this amendment, I rise in support of this amendment, and in particular I rise in support of the other opposition parties. The Member for Airdrie has already articulated the position that I share with him and with many in my caucus.

There's another layer here that is being overlooked, and it's not necessarily just the technicalities because much of what's happening here in amending the rules is how we're going to police and administer ourselves. There is another aspect to this that, in my view, is being missed, and that is the dignity of this House and the respect for the democratic process.

What the amendments here are trying to do is to allow particularly the second and third opposition parties a reasonable opportunity to schedule their time to participate in this process as part of the opposition. Now, we have enough members here. We looked at the original proposal, and we understood that we could deal with this issue. It would be a burden. We would have to have members out of the Assembly when the Assembly was sitting, and those members would go to committee. But for the parties that are smaller, that's problematic, and that does put an added burden on them.

Now, this idea of dignity and respect for the democratic process is simply this. They do represent not just constituencies. They also represent a segment of the population that voted that are also Albertans. They deserve the same respect as any other party, any other representing member. That is why I'm rising now to speak to the amendment to the motion, to make sure that we allow that respect not just from what I would say is the government's view but to look at it from the opposition's view, particularly the second and third parties in opposition, that they put themselves in their shoes on how they're going to participate.

I understand this party has been in power a long time. Maybe that won't happen next time. That's my job. But the reality is this. The opposition does have a certain function, and as tedious as that sounds sometimes to the government, it is a mandatory value to our democratic process that this opposition works effectively, not just having an opposition but having an effective opposition. The second and third parties play a very important role in that effective opposition.

I'm speaking specifically to the 8 a.m. to noon, section (ii), which is to have the estimates in the morning for three hours. The opposition has a tremendous amount of work to prepare for the day. I'm not going to presume that the government does not; I know they're very busy. But our preparation is based on the government actions of either the day before or what they're planning on doing that day. There's a lot of work to be done. When we're going to convene these committees for the estimates at these hours, that puts a burden that, in my view, is too great, particularly on these other parties. It still puts a burden on the

opposition as a whole, but I would argue to you that their participation as an effective opposition, as an effective representative of not just the people who value their ideological views but their own constituents, who expect them to do their job – the fact is that what we're saying here is that we want to participate. There's nothing preventing us from, rather than squeezing more work into the day, sitting a few days longer. We could sit earlier. I mean, that is totally the prerogative of the government to make that decision.

I don't think it's unreasonable to ask, when we look at this amendment, that we look at it as a reasonable person would and say: this makes sense. You may not particularly like it as the government, but the fact is that it is not just respectful of the opposition; it's respectful of the public. It's respectful of Albertans to accept this. This is about the respect and dignity of the democratic process. It is incumbent upon this government and, I would say, incumbent upon the party in power to make sure that the public as a whole enjoys the same respect right across the public and the same dignity, make sure that this process works. This amendment is designed to do nothing more than to make sure that the process works.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a)? I didn't see anyone last time. and I don't see anyone this time. Okay, then? Thank you.

We'll move on to Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with great interest to all of the House leaders and the hon. Member for Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and I'm going to echo many of their comments that have been laid out as arguments as to why the eminently reasonable amendments put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre should be established.

I'll talk about those, but before I get to that, we have to get to an understanding in this House that the object is not to get in as quickly as possible and get out as quickly as possible. That is not the role of the Legislature. It's not the role of the democratic process. In my view, for far too long in this province we have treated this honourable House as a place where the people's concerns aren't addressed as much as they should be.

I think it's fair comment, if not actual fact, that this legislative body has had a history of not sitting as long as other provinces have. You can go through the records of other Legislatures, and there is no doubt that they are sitting longer, having more question period days, having more debate time on budget estimates, and the like. The work of the people is being done in an open and transparent nature by the nature of us being present in this Legislature.

When we're not in this Legislature, of course, the work of government continues, but it doesn't continue in as open and transparent a fashion as it is done when we are all here. When we are all here, the opposition has an opportunity to ask legitimate questions, probe legitimate issues, and get answers from the government on the record as to what is happening in and around this province.

Actually, it is shocking to me that despite the fact that we left this Legislature last in December and we arrived here today for the first day, this government motion to revise the standing orders first came to our attention in a written format yesterday afternoon. It seems to me that this has been sprung upon opposition parties with little notice to allow for the government to *carte blanche* change

these, with no real opportunity for us to respond, with no real opportunity for us to try and call this to public attention, with no real opportunity to try and ensure that the democratic process for allowing it to be done as best it can is accomplished.

4:30

So here we are, with a little more than 24 hours' notice that substantial changes are going to be made to the standing orders as a result of the government wishing to push through things on their timeline, things on their agenda, things that correspond with what they want to see happen. I'm sorry, but that doesn't appear to be fair. Well, I guess fair isn't really the right word. It doesn't appear to be in the best interests of the democratic process, which is what we should be seeking to achieve at all times.

In listening to all three House leaders, it appears that they are in agreement that these are substantial changes to what has happened here in the past. What it can do is that it can allow for us to have morning sittings, multiple evening sittings, and other things like us not being able to be present in this Legislature to debate issues that are occurring in this Chamber when we may be forced to go attend budget debates elsewhere. In my view, that is not in the best interests of how I can best serve my constituents, nor is it in the best interests of any member in this honourable House, whether they are part of government or opposition.

With that, I believe that that proposal should be revisited and revised to ensure that we are allowed that, I think, fundamental right we get as elected representatives in this province, to be present in the Legislative Assembly when issues of concern are brought up. That, I believe, is our fundamental right in being elected in this province. We should not have conflicting obligations going on at the same time.

Another issue that is of primary concern to opposition members is the use of morning times. It is the time when we get to prepare our issues of the day, the strategy we are going to pursue, to read any government releases or issues that they have put forward the previous day or even that morning, and to prepare to respond to those issues. Oftentimes the government has been working on these plans for months if not years, and opposition parties have sometimes a morning to try and assess whether those plans are in the best interests of the people of Alberta. Without having that time to deliberate, to debate, to assess whether government issues or agendas are the correct direction for this province, if we don't have that time in the mornings to prepare and come to an assessment of the situation, in my view we are neutering the opposition further by forcing us to be sidetracked into a whole host of different directions and avenues that may not serve the people of this province the best that we can.

After listening again to the opposition leaders, we have an eminently reasonable proposal made to, I guess, reflect more the opposition's role in this Legislature, to reflect that we do play a part in the process of good government, to reflect the fact that different caucuses have different challenges as a result of not only numbers but research staff and time allocation. Simply put, in a party with five members here it is more difficult to schedule, to get everyone organized, to get people where they need to be to best serve the Albertan people. It is like that as well for the fourth party. As we heard from the hon. House leader for the Official Opposition, he understands that conundrum, having worked in a caucus of four in the last elected body of this honourable House. In my view, this is eminently reasonable. It allows us to do our work in a more reasonable fashion.

I'll finish the way I started. What is the hurry to get out of here? What is the hurry to not allow for us to have full and sober debate and full and detailed analysis of what the government is putting

forward to the people of Alberta? In my view – I've held this view for a long time – we should be sitting longer, not shorter. The motion put forward by the government: if we allow the government motion to go through, if they avail themselves of the options they wish to avail themselves of, in my view it will serve to undermine the democratic process further, and it's something we should not be striving for.

On that note, I urge all members to support these amendments put forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and allow us to do our work as both government and opposition members in this great province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone wish to question or comment?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was going to wait until all speakers opposite had spoken to the amendment, but I'm happy to respond to some of the concerns raised.

It's interesting to me that people immediately go to the worst possible interpretation of anything to describe what's going to happen. If you look at the standing orders that we have today, estimates would be scheduled with Committee of Supply in the afternoon and possibly two at a time every evening three days a week, and we would have them done, in essence, in two weeks. This is hardly an amendment that's going to shorten the amount of time in the House.

In fact, what I've said to opposition House leaders and what the plan is is to take four weeks to do estimates. Instead of doing 54 hours, which the current standing orders provide for, we're talking about 75 to 79 hours of time. Instead of three hours for major ministries, that have \$12 billion in funds, it's up to six hours to do them. I sit here and hear people say that democracy as we know it is going to be dead because – we're doing what? – we're changing the standing orders so we can do a more robust planning process to say: how can we handle the estimates properly?

I acknowledged right up front that members of the opposition don't want to sit in the mornings. I understand that. I don't want to sit in the mornings either, quite frankly. I don't think any members on this side want to sit in the mornings. We all have work to do in the mornings. We all get up early in the morning. I think we all do. I certainly leave home by 6 or 6:30 in the morning most days. Often I'm surprised that the Official Opposition lets their staff get in ahead of them. I don't think that happens very often on this side of the House. We usually show leadership by getting in there first, but I digress.

The fact of the matter is that this isn't about changing democracy as we know it. It's about trying to find a flexibility in the standing orders which will allow us together to plan an estimates process, which will allow for a robust investigation and discussion about the estimates of each department. That's what we plan to do. Yes, the motion that I put forward does provide the potential for morning meetings. I would anticipate that we likely won't have morning meetings, but possibly we will need one or two in order to get it done on the schedule that I've set out of having the Appropriation Act passed by the end of April, which is in two months. It's a pretty good amount of time. It allows people to do their constituency weeks and their research, to have the time. It allows for people to focus on the estimates if we don't have other committees meeting at the same time. It's a fairly robust process.

We will work. We will talk with the opposition, as I always have and always will, to find out what their needs are, to find out how we balance to make sure that the critic is showing up at the same time as the ministry and those sorts of things. That's always

been how it works. It's not in the standing orders, but that's always been the way we've done it, and that's the way we'll continue to do it because that makes for a good operation of this House. We tend to do that. Sometimes we disagree. Sometimes we do end up disagreeing on a matter, but lots of times we work out that schedule in an amicable way, in a way that allows us all to get on and do our jobs.

To speak specifically to some of the comments raised, I don't have any problem with section A1A, actually, because that's our practice. You give the projected government business, and you send a copy of it to everybody at the same time. It would be our intention to continue that, whether it's written in the standing orders or not. If you want to write it in the standing orders, that doesn't cause me any problems.

4:40

Section A1B, on striking out section 5, is a little problematic because if you want what used to be Committee of Supply to meet for three hours in the afternoon, you've got to sort of start on time. If you don't start on time or if you've moved off the clock, as we did today with a few points of order and things like that, you end up losing that time. Section 5 would not abrogate the opportunity for members to attend and participate in the House for business of the House, but it would say that you don't actually have to sit around and watch us – although it's scintillating, I'm sure, because I'm usually participating in them – debate the standing orders and whether there's been a point of order or not.

The only other time that that would come into play is if there was a Standing Order 30 and we adjourned the ordinary business of the House to discuss a matter of urgent and pressing necessity. As members know, there's no motion that's voted on in that. It's a debate. People can participate in that debate, but not everybody typically sticks around for those debates either. That's the only circumstance under which you would have the committee meeting while the House was still meeting. I'm not even sure about the Standing Order 30 one. I'm not sure if a Standing Order 30 would be able to come up in that circumstance, but I stand to be corrected on that. In the ordinary business of the House we'd adjourn right after the Routine, and there wouldn't be time for the motion to come forward. But, in my mind, I don't know. I'd have to go and have a look at that. In any event, that would be the only circumstance where a committee would meet.

Now, with respect to subsection C the practice has always been, in my experience – and I have about 15 years of it as House leader – that we discuss the schedule with the opposition. We prepare a schedule because you have to start someplace, so a straw-dog schedule. We send it to the opposition. They typically come back and point out where we've erred in terms of their critic's availability relative to the minister's availability. Quite frankly, in the past that's been a very difficult schedule to prepare because we have had small caucuses on the opposition side and an inability to match critics to ministries, with small caucuses trying to be in two places at once.

We've had in earlier times A, B, C, D committees, four subcommittees of supply that met and did it. We've had designated committees of supply that met on a Friday morning. We have done estimates in a number of different ways. One of the things that's been consistent, in my experience, through all of those ways is that the opposition has wanted more time and more flexibility with respect to the committees, which we've built into this motion, and they've always complained about two committees sitting at the same time, which I understand thoroughly and completely.

But if you want to do it in an appropriate time frame and you want to allow for as long as possible to do it in terms of the number of hours and the flexibility of scheduling, then you have to sort of look at it and say: "Okay. What are the building blocks that make this happen? What are the mornings, afternoons, and evenings that are available to schedule? How do we do it and minimize the number of things that disrupt the business that we all do every day in terms of mornings or in terms of two committees sitting together in the evening?" I think we can do that. I think we can work that out. But I don't believe it's something you're going to be able to quantify in the rules. I think you have to have the ability to do that.

Now, I don't agree with section C(a)(3) because while we actually will probably do that and always have, we haven't sat down and made it sort of an agreement piece, and there's a reason for that. The Government House Leader has to have the flexibility to work with opposition critics' schedules, ministers' schedules, and a number of other things that come up to try and get it all together, and we do that. But we don't sit down and do that; we send it back and forth. We don't sit down in a meeting and try and hammer it out, but we achieve the same result. I would suggest that that's a good way to do it.

What I suggest is that we send it to the committees because the committees ought to at least nominally be in charge of their schedule. Nobody would suggest that we send it to the committees without giving them a straw-dog schedule to look at. The committee chairs don't meet with their committees without, as I understand it – and it certainly would be an appropriate practice – sitting down with the vice-chairs to work out what's happening and then put it on the table for the committee to discuss. Then, of course, if there's something that's missed or somebody has a point to make, the committee can do it. That's what we've provided for, and I don't see that A1C(a)(3) adds any value to that or that (3.1) or (3.2) add any value to that. It's a process, and it can't be fully codified.

Now, suborder (5), the deletion of the morning meetings. Well, as I've said, we probably won't have any morning meetings other than perhaps on Wednesdays. There's already a meeting anyway on Wednesday, so it's not going to disrupt anybody's schedule any more than it's already disrupted by that meeting.

Section D: that's the one reversion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre said: well, you have four distinct days. But she would know as well as anyone that when you introduce a bill for first reading, there's actually no debate. There are supposed to be very short introductory comments. Sometimes they do go on a little longer than they probably are supposed to, but there's no debate on it. Whether it comes in on the night of Committee of Supply, as it has in my experience for the first 10 years of my life in here up until about five years ago – I could be wrong by a year either way – reverting to Introduction of Bills was the norm, and it was only disrupted by my inadvertent stumbling about and causing umbrage to the hon. member. It doesn't shorten anything, really. I will say that you could save a day on that, no question. That's probably what made you upset in the first place now that I think about it.

With respect to section 9, again, we have had sort of an informal practice of saying: how many days do we need to sit in Committee of Supply for supplementary estimates? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely right. She's one of the authors of this sort of understanding that we've had that if it's over a billion dollars, it ought to have two days, as we used to call it. But there was uncertainty in there, and we're proposing in the standing orders amendment that we have to provide that certainty, that it can be referred for not fewer than three hours. I think the

clear implication is that it can be referred for more than three hours. There's no reason to believe that the protocol won't continue.

The amendments, I think, other than A1A, don't significantly add value. They do create problems with respect to the process. With respect, there is no intention here to subvert democracy or to bludgeon the opposition. It's really about how we do this process in an appropriate way.

I do hear the Official Opposition and the other opposition parties talking about the need for the mornings, and I can understand that it takes them a full morning to get ready for the questions that they have in a 50-minute question period. I can understand that it might take that amount of time to prepare for that. They are reactive – there's no question about that – rather than proactive in that process. I don't mean in any sense to diminish the work that they do. One of the speakers earlier said that a good opposition makes a great government. I think the corollary for that is that we must have a good opposition because we have a great government. We want opposition to work well. There's no question that we should want opposition to work well. It's good for democracy if opposition works well.

There's no question that we work long hours and difficult hours – particularly around budget it's difficult – so I would like us to develop a schedule that works for us. I would like us to develop a schedule which allows us to have a thorough examination of every department, including the time for larger departments. I think we need to understand that it is a portion of our work, not all of our work but a very important portion of our work. The two months, including, I understand, constituency weeks, ought to be enough time for us to actually deal with the estimates and pass an appropriation bill.

There is no way that anybody is going to talk about six committees a day, that Edmonton-Strathcona raised. That's just not on. It's a worst-case-scenario type of thing. You know, the rules should allow us to have the flexibility we need to sit down and work together as parliamentarians to devise a calendar that works for all of us. Yes, in certain circumstances one group or the other will feel aggrieved about something, but they won't feel aggrieved about the whole thing. It'll work for this House and for Albertans. That means that, yes, we need the flexibility to say that in some circumstances there might be a requirement for two committees to meet at a time. It shouldn't happen routinely. It shouldn't happen very often. But we do it now, and it has worked, and it can work when necessary.

4:50

Okay. I've got one minute left. The Order Paper with these motions on it: Calgary-Buffalo, I think, indicated that he hadn't seen it in writing. It was available at 8 o'clock yesterday morning, not late in the afternoon, and it's certainly consistent with what I put on the table in our discussion earlier. There are no surprises in it. Is it a work-in-progress? Yes, I think we should consider it a work-in-progress. We have agreed to meet and talk about the rules again. Whether we revisit these specific ones or not I'm open for discussion on, but we need to have something on the table.

The budget is coming down on Thursday. I, for one, like to plan my life and like to plan the lives of my colleagues to the extent that it's my responsibility to do so. I'd like to get on with planning that schedule for estimates, and if we make some twists and changes in it, so be it. But let's pass this motion unamended. Let's defeat the amendments except for amendment A1A, pass the motion, get on with getting the schedule together, and work in good faith, as we always have. It's my continuing commitment that as House leader I try to do that to the extent possible, and I

think we can have a very good session and a very good examination of the estimates.

The Speaker: I believe, Edmonton-Centre, that you're rising under 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: I am indeed.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. The surprise, to me, in looking at what actually came out in the Order Paper yesterday, was that the government had not moved on anything. I thought that after the discussions we'd had, there would have been some movement from government on something. That was the surprise for me.

Now, let me just go back again. I appreciate the support on section A, but I'm going to ask the Government House Leader and the rest of the members on the government side to consider section C again. I can see I'm not going to win the argument that the committees should not meet while the Assembly is in. I continue to think that that shouldn't happen, but okay; I'm not going to win that one. I do honestly believe that I improved what the government had in section C, and therefore the government should not fear codifying what is already done. You should not fear the opposition, and neither should you fear yourself. I believe that you can change this now if it turns out to be a tremendous problem. Let's face it. The government has got the majority. They can come back the next time and change it if it has turned out to be a tremendous difficulty for them.

All I've done here: I've actually codified what we tend to do, and I think that gives us some certainty to go forward with. It's fair. It contains the flexibility necessary. It does say that if the committee doesn't like what we did, they can change it. If the House leaders don't manage to agree, which does happen, surprisingly, then we have a fail-safe in there about who would start to put this together. In the end, I left the section that sends it back to the Government House Leader to be able to work with the last-minute declarations of travel plans for ministers, God bless them, each and every one, and their tiny white socks. But I believe this is a very reasonable amendment to be made, and I would ask the Government House Leader to look at it again because I think this does make it better. It does offer some certainty. It does show that there's no evil intent from government.

You know, the morning thing: if for some reason government wants to use it to pick up the time, we will work with you to find another time to do this. We were more than willing to add on to Thursday afternoons to do it, and that's the same reasoning that the Government House Leader uses to say: well, you know, if there's business in the Assembly and you have to go off and do committee, that can be worked out. Same thing. If we've got people that have to get on the bus or the plane or the car or their bicycle and go home on Thursday afternoon to get back into their constituency, fair enough. Let them go, and the rest of us will stay and work on whatever we have to work on on Thursday afternoon and extend the period from 4:30 to 6.

I think I've been very reasonable. This one is important to me. I think it sends a number of signals about responsibility and flexibility. I would ask the Government House Leader to reconsider that, and I'm going to give him enough time to say anything he wants in the last two minutes.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

Mr. Hancock: I know that's questions and comments, but I didn't hear any questions. I heard a lot of comments. But I think I answered all the questions that were raised. I understand her desire. It is normally the opposition's desire to codify everything, and it is usually the government's desire to provide frameworks within which to work. That's a distinction that always happens between government and opposition. I actually prefer the frameworks because it gives us the flexibility to sit down and make it work out the way it should work for all of us, and I am committed to doing that. I know that at the end of the day there will be things that they will be upset about, and I know that at the end of the day there will be things that my caucus will want to kick me in the butt for. That's the way the system works, and that's the burden we bear as House leaders.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do actually have a question for the hon. member. I would ask him to clarify a comment you just made concerning having committees meet simultaneously and how it works for the members. Most recently a member of the third party had to run between meetings, back and forth, to get a vote in one meeting, then run to another meeting to get a vote in another meeting. If you could elaborate, how does that actually work? From where I sit, that's ineffective, where he can't participate completely in a full committee meeting and has to leave a committee and ask someone to call him back when the vote happens on his own amendment.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Just before I go to the final speaker on my list, which is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I'll just remind you that in the case of a division the bells will ring for 30 seconds, and then there will be an eight-and-a-half-minute silence, and then there will be a one-minute ringing of the bells to bring people back in. Just to refresh your memories, because we haven't been here for a while, that's how a division would work if any divisions are called.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this amendment A1, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, on Government Motion 24. As I sort of moved through Government Motion 24, I was changing from ambivalence to several distinct issues that I could see, problems that were being brought forward here. They've been articulated mostly by several other speakers here previously, but I guess I just wanted to put this in perspective. Of course, I had participated in budget debates previously, before we changed to this new, slightly byzantine and confusing system that you're using here now, where we're breaking out of the Legislature somehow, breaking out into different rooms.

You know, I question that fundamentally. It seems as though this is one of the most basic things that we do here and are elected to do here in the Legislature, and I wonder why, first and foremost, this has somehow changed, that we've moved out of this Chamber and the rules and the things that are associated with this Chamber into these different committee rooms, doing debates on ministry budgets at the same time.

Now, all of the obvious things have been described here already, with people perhaps having to run from one ministry to another and so forth, but, you know, I would just like to say that having the debate in this room, with all of the things that are surrounding us, the amenities and the things that are afforded us here in the Legislature, I really think is fundamental to our

responsibility as legislators to demonstrate the budget to the public in the most transparent way possible so that people can understand it in the simplest way possible as well. It's not just an overload on smaller parties and legislation by exhaustion, Mr. Speaker, by doing this system. I think it's an overload on the public, too, and the media and the interest groups that need to study and adjust their businesses and so forth to meet the new budget demands.

There's an incredible level of sophistication that goes into a budget and often a great deal of money in each area. So I find it really challenging, and it goes against my instincts and best principles to consider that we even break out from this Legislature to debate these budget estimates as seems to have been the practice in these last four years. That being said, that seems to be the new normal here.

5:00

You know, it's interesting that I have an opportunity to speak last on this because there are certain sections of the hon. member's amendment here that just seem so eminently reasonable that I implore each member in the House to have some sober second consideration. It seems as though amendment A1A is meeting the needs of the government, so I'm hoping that we will in fact see this amendment actually pass. Let's do it. I mean, if it's eminently reasonable and it meets the needs of all different parties in the House, let's go ahead.

The same with the morning committee idea. You know, I noted a tone of sarcasm with the House leader talking about the mornings, but it's so much more than just preparing for question period. It's a way by which we help to reach out to the public and to the media and to prepare a myriad of different things that go on during the legislative session. If we somehow diminish that, if we diminish the time surrounding that, we so, too, diminish the relevance and the importance of this legislative body to the public that elected it to do the job of governance here in the province of Alberta.

You know, be careful what you wish for. People take steps, small steps, away from democracy whenever democracy is diminished in the eyes of the public amongst the legislators that are elected to conduct that and the media that reports on it as well. I simply don't want to be participating in that sort of diminishment, Mr. Speaker.

Committees taking place at the same time: yes, we do have to codify these things. Yes, we do need the provisions that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre put into subsection (3) of this amendment, because while intentions always may be good – right? – we can't always guarantee that such a fine House leader as the one we have now will be in that same chair. Maybe someone with less honourable intentions might take that same place. You know, that's what we do. We make laws expecting the best from people but legislating to ensure that we protect from the worst, right? I made that up, but I'll bet you I'm paraphrasing it from somebody else and somewhere else.

Anyway, those are some of my concerns, you know, the same: section C, the codification. If it's appropriate practice, if it's best practice, if it's conventional wisdom, there's nothing wrong with putting it into law.

Perhaps the most interesting thing that the House leader said – and it's fun to be speaking last instead of you speaking last because I can get the last word – is that this is always a work-in-progress anyway. Well, that's fine. Then there should be nothing wrong with putting some of these things into codification. We can always change it later as the standing orders are wont to do from time to time. We change them. So instead of perhaps looking at

this as, you know, that we're putting something in stone here, we are looking for best practices and refining those best practices over time.

Mr. Speaker and all members of this House, I would strongly suggest that we do in fact vote in favour of amendment A1. It's eminently reasonable, and ultimately I think it is a reflection of the responsibility we have as legislators here in this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any questioners or commentators? None.

Are there any other speakers to the amendment?

If not, then we'll proceed with the vote on the amendment section by section since that is the wish of the House. What I'll do is read out A1A, and then we'll vote. Then we'll do A1B, and then we'll vote, then A1C, D, and E. If that's agreeable to members, we'll proceed like that.

[Motion on amendment A1A lost]

[Motion on amendment A1B lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1C lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:06 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Donovan	Rowe
Anglin	Eggen	Strankman
Bikman	Hehr	Wilson
Blakeman	Pedersen	

Against the motion:

Allen	Fritz	Olesen
Amery	Goudreau	Olson
Bhullar	Griffiths	Pastoor
Brown	Hancock	Quest
Calahasen	Hughes	Redford
Cao	Jablonski	Rodney
Casey	Jansen	Scott
Cusanelli	Jeneroux	Starke
Dallas	Johnson, L.	VanderBurg
DeLong	Leskiw	Weadick
Denis	Luan	Woo-Paw
Drysdale	McDonald	Xiao
Fawcett	McQueen	Young
Fraser	Oberle	

Totals: For – 11 Against – 41

[Motion on amendment A1C lost]

The Speaker: We can now vote on amendment A1D.

[Motion on amendment A1D lost]

The Speaker: Now A1E.

[Motion on amendment A1E lost]

The Speaker: We are now back to the main motion. Are there any other speakers to the main motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's unfortunate that some of those amendments are not going to see the light of day, but I sort of planned for that. I thought that we would run up against this brick wall, so I just hived off one part of the amendment here, that I think is just so eminently reasonable, and I made it an amendment myself that I would just like to pass out to everyone. The original is the top copy there. I will make my comments after it is passed out, right?

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, would it be acceptable to the House for the hon. member to continue with his speech while the amendment is being distributed to you in writing?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is that agreeable to you, hon. member, with the amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, absolutely.

The Speaker: If so, please proceed, then, while the pages continue to distribute it. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I appreciate that. I just have some small comments. The amendment that I have here says that Government Motion 24 be amended in part A in section 6(a) in the proposed Standing Order 59.01(5) by striking out clause (f) and substituting the following: "no more than one Legislative Policy Committee shall be scheduled to consider estimates at any one time."

Now, I think we've heard the arguments around this fairly clearly, Mr. Speaker. Just reading out that amendment again speaks to the eminent wisdom and common sense of not having more than one estimate scheduled at the same time. As I've said, it's not just for the sake of smaller parties, right? Please be cognizant that nothing ever stays the same. Smaller parties get larger, and larger parties smaller, too, right? So think about the future, you know. Think about yourselves in the same situation, sooner rather than later, I'm sure.

You know, it's also to speak of this issue of the public and the media and special interests being able to absorb and analyze those estimates as they unfold and not having more than one at the same time, right? Again, going back to my original assertion, why shouldn't these budget estimates take place in the place that was built to debate this expenditure of public money in the first place, which is this House that we are all sitting in today? It's not as though we don't have enough time to do that, Mr. Speaker. We certainly do. We have the spring and the months ahead of us to debate one committee at a time.

Certainly, my amendment does not preclude the possibility of having them scheduled in different places either. I shouldn't be confusing it with my personal opinion that the budget should be moved back here to the actual legislative Chamber. This motion, that is in front of each person now, is specifically designed to prohibit estimates from happening concurrently like they did last year, where for the first time they had two committees meet in the afternoon and then one in the evening, apparently.

This, of course, hugely prejudices certain parties that have more than one critic area to their responsibility, of which I am one. You know, combining this, if it does fail, with the idea of morning estimates, I think, leads to potential catastrophic failure of our ability to debate these estimates in a reasonable and timely sort of way. Like I said before, this idea of legislating by exhaustion –

and it does not just apply to the members here. I think it applies to the public as well, to which we are responsible. Further, if committee chairs are allowed, as proposed above, to schedule estimates, then it's possible that opposition critics will be compromised in this way.

My amendment is a very modest proposal, Mr. Speaker. It just allows that space to operate in a functional way but, I think, also in a philosophical way.

You know, I find it a bit strange that all of these changes are coming so quickly on this first day of our spring session here. I don't think it speaks well to the tone that the government is trying to set here to work together with all members of the Legislature and the media and the public but, rather, perpetuates this idea of things happening behind closed doors and with a degree of secrecy and not full disclosure, that I find disturbing and that I think many people in the public do, too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments to be made under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, let us proceed with the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had actually raised this issue with the hon. member earlier under section 29(2)(a), so I'll bring this up right now on this amendment, which is exactly what I was talking about, with the opposition members, particularly the third party, going from one committee to another committee. Having the House leader refer to two committees meeting simultaneously having been done in the past: from my experience even in the last sitting, that did not work very well for the smaller opposition parties. Again, I would state that position, and I will support this amendment for that very reason. Particularly for these members who have to race from committee to committee, not being able to sit in for an entire committee meeting and listen to other people debate: in my opinion, I think that is ineffective. Unless somebody can argue something to the contrary to convince me that it's somehow effective, I will certainly stay and support this motion.

The hon. member has a chance to clarify those comments that were made earlier on the effectiveness of having simultaneous committee meetings. I'm interested in hearing that.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on this amendment. It is an amendment that I will support, although I know it'll probably be a fruitless effort. You know, I appreciate the robust discussion that the hon. Government House Leader has allowed for the estimates debates. I think that there's a lot of positive movement on the government side in allowing for more time in certain ministries and allowing for more debate. I think that's definitely a positive step.

But the reality is that earlier today we had the Premier lament the tone of the opposition. I'm going to stand here today, and I'm going to lament the tone of the government because the tone of the government hasn't changed from the fall session, where every amendment that was put forward, the strong majority of them, was immediately dismissed. Many were laughed off, and we're seeing it here already right now. The amendment is being laughed off.

The idea that opposition parties require time to prepare in the morning for question period is being sloughed off.

I'm sure that the majority of the government caucus isn't burdened with having to read bills and, you know, prepare speeches on them because we haven't seen many of them actually do that, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that most members of the opposition do do that, and they speak to every piece of legislation. We did on all 10 of the bills that came through the House in the fall session, and we saw very, very few of the government members actually speak to legislation unless they were specifically challenged or upset by something that an opposition member said.

This is about the democratic process. For a caucus of four, as much as this amendment may not pass – and the Government House Leader has suggested that in good faith he will negotiate. I would strongly hope that he negotiates with the understanding that when there are critics in the third and fourth parties that have multiple committees, not in any way, shape, or form on any day shall one of those critics be faced with having to choose between two committees that they are the critic of. I think that that is a reasonable request, and I hope that, you know, with his ability and knowledge of the way this process works, wisdom some would say, that should be very easy to achieve.

Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be speaking in support of this amendment, which I'm now assuming is A2. Is that correct? Did we name it?

The Speaker: Yes, hon. member, Parliamentary Counsel has noted this as A2.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there is anyone who wishes. No?

Okay. Let us move on, then. Are there any other speakers?

5:30

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, ever-optimistic gal that I am . . . [interjections] I'll tell you that some days are worse than others.

We have the Member for Edmonton-Calder moving his amendment A2 to section 6(a) to essentially make sure that no more than one policy committee is scheduled at the same time. We've touched a bit on this in the previous amendment that we made. I hear a lot of supportive statements from the members on the other side that they understand but that they really need flexibility and that they don't want to codify any of this because they might need it sometime. You know, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I've got to say: hooley. It is said with great love, great kindness. But, honestly, I think there's a difference between wanting flexibility to deal with circumstances that occur to us occasionally or perhaps rarely, that kind of flexibility, and a fairly rigid adherence to an end date.

You know, at one point I called some of the stuff that the Government House Leader was trying to bring in through a change in the standing orders überclosure because that's what it would have been. It would have been a gigantic way of closing off any debate because at that time we were talking about coming to an end date that was finite and that everything would be done by then, and if it wasn't, it would all get voted on that day. It was like a huge garage door or a – what's the thing that comes down and chops people's heads off?

Some Hon. Members: Guillotine.

Ms Blakeman: Or a huge guillotine that just came down and chopped the end off all the bills that were still up. I think I rightly called it überclosure.

What I'm seeing here is an adherence to a timeline that has that same kind of zeal included in it. The Government House Leader is saying: oh, come on now; we've got two months on that. Well, actually not true. Yeah, I'm going to let that statement stand because we, in fact, don't start debating this budget according to the flexible plans that are before us until the middle of the month. So there's a week, and then we all get to go back and try and make up for lost time in our constituencies and work like the devil there for two weeks, and then we come back here, and we've got three weeks left in April before that guillotine deadline that the hon. Government House Leader has referred to. So, no, it's not eight weeks. That's a very strange kind of math if you want to do it that way. It's four weeks: one week here and three weeks once we're back in April.

We are actually trying to rip through – what's the total budget we're looking at now? – \$39 billion, \$40 billion in four weeks, so \$10 billion a week. The government, you know, agrees that it wouldn't want to call more than two committees at one time and that it wouldn't likely do that but says: well, we probably will be sitting on Wednesday mornings so that we can get it in. So we're talking two on Monday night, one Tuesday afternoon, two on Tuesday night. That's five so far. Wednesday morning is six, Wednesday afternoon seven, Wednesday night eight, nine. That's it. We could still get through nine slots a week. That's pretty fast because in some of them the slots could be two different departments at the same time.

What we've done here is an improvement in that we can spend more time on some of the more complex or larger budgets, but we didn't go as far as we should have done. Actually, it's kind of funny because what we've got is the Government House Leader saying: "Trust me. It's okay. Really, trust me." I know that I have a dewy freshness to my visage, but I am not that young. I did not just fall off the turnip truck. There will be no trust here because they haven't earned it, quite frankly.

You know, I say all of this in fun, with a happy look on my face, and underneath is this writhing pool of rage. You'd never know it by looking at me. But that is what we're . . . [interjections] I'm sorry. Now I'm amusing my colleagues.

But what's at the essence of all of this is important to me because it does make a difference. If you've got somebody that is in the Assembly because they're arguing a point of order, what does that mean now? We shouldn't call points of order for fear that our budget debate is going to be called? So we better not do a point of order, even though it's outrageous what's just been said, because your particular critic area is going to be coming up in a committee, and if you stay to do the point of order, then you're going to be late for your own budget committee.

You know, none of that is too much of a sky is falling, Chicken Little sort of scenario because I've been there. I've done all of these different variations of budget debate. Frankly, I've had to run – actually, we used to have one set of budgets in 512 and one set here, and the elevators were really slow in this building, so you just pounded your way up and down those stairs. Very good for the fitness level, not so good for being able to keep all your documents together, and you know how much I love my paper. So I was heaving up and down these stairs back here between two committees when I was critic for both of them. It definitely happens, and I think it will happen here.

It just seems that this government, with such a big majority, that is supposed to be so open and transparent and generous and kind – I don't get it. Why can't you be open and transparent and generous and kind? I don't see you being that. I see you being narrow and focused and sometimes a little bit mean about how this stuff goes on.

I'll admit that I probably have not swayed anyone to my side with the speech that I just gave. I'm just guessing, but I'm pretty sure I didn't convince anyone to support this. I apologize to my colleague because I have let my disappointment at losing the previous motion kind of spill over into this. Nonetheless, that is the point of it, to try and do a good job.

I've said before that my previous boss, the previous Member for Edmonton-Riverview, had said to me at one point that if we became government – at that point it looked like a possibility – he would allow me to be the Minister of Revenge because I harbour so many daylight revenge dreams in my head. But, honestly, there are days here when my biggest revenge dream is that all of you over there will be sitting over here because you will have to work under these rules that you have now done to yourself.

In most provinces that would have happened, and you would understand what it's like to have been in the opposition. You talk to anybody that's served, like, three terms in Ontario or Manitoba or B.C., and they've been in the opposition. They know what it's like, and they wouldn't be passing rules like this.

It's a sad thing that we can't share our experiences in the way other people might be able to, and I think, actually, that's to your detriment. But, you know, I'll just keep on with that very well detailed revenge scenario in my head.

Mr. Eggen: Karma. It will be karma.

Ms Blakeman: It'll be karma. You guys would just not believe it if you were over here.

I'll end with that – thank you very much – and I do urge everyone to support amendment A2, which tries to make it so that we don't have two legislative policy committees meeting on budget debates at the same time.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments to the previous speech?

Seeing none, let us move on, then, to the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm cut to the quick. After all these years of negotiating and deliberating and sitting down with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to make sure we have an eminently reasonable calendar of estimates, she bears a grudge and has now openly indicated that grudge. I'm astonished.

5:40

I do need to say that the hon. member should reflect that the standing orders that we've had over the past number of years have been changed from time to time. We've always tried to find a better way to accomplish the concerns of the opposition and to maintain the schedules that are needed to keep government business going and to keep the system working. We have had A, B, C, D committees, where we worked out schedules. I think that you were part of helping to work out those schedules, where A and C met and D and B met, and they were upstairs and downstairs and in the ladies' chamber and all over the place.

The fact of the matter is that we've become a lot more refined now. We have two committee rooms that have been purpose built, which are much more satisfactory for committee meetings, so that officials can come in and people can be heard. They operate much better, and that works well. Thanks to the Legislative Assembly Office for creating those spaces. So if there happen to be two meetings, there are now about 30 or 40 steps between the two, not up and down the stairs. We've improved your life already

dramatically, and I can't even take credit for it. It was Leg. Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, we used to have members come back on Friday mornings for designated Committee of Supply, and that was an all-morning committee. Good heavens. It took all morning, but we sat all morning to have Committee of Supply that way.

In the 15 years that I've been here I don't believe we've had more than one year when there hasn't been two committees sitting at a time. But having said that, it was our goal – and it was our goal with the original proposal that we put out – to arrange it so that members had one committee at a time to sit at, whether that was a morning or an afternoon or an evening committee, that they would only probably have one a day that they had to attend, or if they were attending two a day, they wouldn't have to attend one the next day, so there was plenty of time for them to be prepared for their particular critic responsibilities or, if they're on the government side, their particular interest areas.

You know, we actually put on the table a very open schedule which would lengthen the time in some departments. It would give more time than the standing orders currently provide, which, as I said, would be 54 hours, not the 75 to 79 hours that we're talking about. In order to accomplish that and still accomplish the goal of passing the budget within a reasonable period of time, i.e. the end of April – in most parliamentary jurisdictions the real challenge is to try and get a budget passed by the end of the fiscal year. We have tried to do that in a good number of years, but we've also understood that sometimes you wait for a federal budget, sometimes you wait for some of the fiscal situations to clarify, and sometimes there's just an awful lot of work that goes in and it's not fair to make officials work over the Christmas holidays so that we can get a budget in on February 1 or whatever. That's happened in the past, too.

What we've tried to do is what we've always tried to do and what I've done with the hon. member opposite for longer than I care to tell you and with new House leaders now for a shorter period of time, to develop a good estimates schedule so that all members can do their jobs well. I think that with the proposal on the table, yes, there will be a little back and forth as to whether we can have a morning meeting here or two committees meeting there, but nobody's talking about all the committees meeting at the same time every day so that we can rush out of here. Nobody ever suggested that.

In fact, what was put on the table is a longer time for estimates, an eminently reasonable period of time for passing the Appropriation Act, you know, within a month after the fiscal year ends. Not a bad plan to have, to try and get the budget passed early in the year. It is eminently reasonable, and I would challenge the hon. member to say when I have ever been unreasonable with her when we've been talking about the estimates. We've jostled back and forth. We've had to move things around so that we haven't had, you know, a critic having to be in two places at once.

Actually, it's the fourth party who's had a tougher problem in past years when they only had two members. Now they've got four members. It's going to be so much easier for them this year because they've got twice as many people to go to all those meetings.

Yes, when you're a smaller caucus in this House, it is tougher. But, you know, that's just life. That's life. With a small caucus you have to work harder because you are the critic. If there are 16 departments – there are more than that – you do have four departments that you have to be the critic of. Sorry. I can't change that for you. I wouldn't want to change that for you. It's something you should have, something you should hold on to, something you should treasure.

Mr. Speaker, what we've put on the table is something that provides a framework of flexibility. We'll sit down and negotiate and work on – negotiate is the wrong word. We'll sit down and collaborate on a schedule which works for most people most of the time. It will be rough. It will have some rough edges. There's no question. There's always a time when you have to sort of say: well, we've gone about as far as we can go, and we can't move the blocks on this Rubik's cube any further, and that's about done now.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that members defeat this amendment, pass Government Motion 24, and let us get on with planning our work and working our plan.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments from anyone?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to amendment A2?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the main motion?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the question has been called.

Are you seeking a point of clarification, hon. member?

Mr. Anderson: No. I would like to speak to the main motion.

The Speaker: Well, the question has been called here.

Mr. Anderson: I know. I'm trying to get back into the swing of things.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. Perhaps you can get your comments done some other how.

Let us carry on, then.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

Committee Membership Changes

25. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the membership for the Assembly's five standing committees and the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services be replaced with the following:
- (1) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Khan, chair; Mrs. Jablonski, deputy chair; Mr. Anderson; Mr. Casey; Mr. Dorward; Mr. Eggen; Ms Kubinec; Mr. Sandhu; and Dr. Sherman.
 - (2) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Mr. Cao, chair; Mr. McDonald, deputy chair; Mr. Bikman; Ms Blakeman; Dr. Brown; Ms DeLong; Mr. Eggen; Mrs. Leskiw; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Rogers; and Mr. Wilson.
 - (3) Standing Committee on Private Bills: Mr. Xiao, chair; Ms L. Johnson, deputy chair; Mr. Barnes; Mr.

Bhardwaj; Dr. Brown; Ms Cusanelli; Ms DeLong; Mr. Fox; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Goudreau; Mrs. Jablonski; Mrs. Leskiw; Ms Notley; Ms Olesen; Mr. Rowe; Mr. Strankman; Dr. Swann; and Mr. Webber.

- (4) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Ms Olesen, chair; Mr. Lemke, deputy chair; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Cao; Mr. Casey; Mr. Hehr; Ms Jansen; Ms Kennedy-Glans; Ms Kubinec; Mr. Luan; Mr. McAllister; Ms Notley; Mr. Pedersen; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Sandhu; Mr. Saskiw; Mrs. Towle; and Mr. Young.
- (5) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Mr. Anderson, chair; Mr. Dorward, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Amery; Mr. Anglin; Mr. Bilous; Mr. Donovan; Ms Fenske; Mr. Goudreau; Mr. Hale; Mr. Hehr; Mr. Jeneroux; Mr. Khan; Ms Pastoor; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Quest; Mrs. Sarich; and Mr. Stier.
- (6) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: Mr. Zwozdesky, chair; Mr. Rogers, deputy chair; Mr. Casey; Mrs. Forsyth; Mr. Fraser; Ms Kennedy-Glans; Mr. Mason; Mr. McDonald; Mr. Quest; Dr. Sherman; and Ms Smith.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

5:50 Committee Membership Changes

26. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the membership for the Assembly's three legislative policy committees be replaced with the following:
- (1) Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Mr. Quest, chair; Mrs. Forsyth, deputy chair; Dr. Brown; Ms Cusanelli; Ms DeLong; Mr. Fraser; Mrs. Fritz; Mr. Goudreau; Mrs. Jablonski; Ms Jansen; Mr. Jeneroux; Mrs. Leskiw; Ms Notley; Mr. Pedersen; Dr. Swann; Mrs. Towle; Mr. Wilson; and Mr. Young.
 - (2) Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: Mr. Amery, chair; Mr. Fox, deputy chair; Mr. Bhardwaj; Mr. Cao; Mr. Donovan; Mr. Dorward; Mr. Eggen; Mr. Hehr; Mr. Luan; Mr. McDonald; Ms Olesen; Ms Pastoor; Mr. Quadri; Mr. Rogers; Mr. Rowe; Mrs. Sarich; Mr. Strankman; and Mr. Xiao.
 - (3) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: Ms Kennedy-Glans, chair; Mr. Anglin, deputy chair; Mr. Allen; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Bikman; Mr. Bilous; Ms Blakeman; Ms Calahasen; Mr. Casey; Ms Fenske; Mr. Hale; Ms L. Johnson; Mr. Khan; Ms Kubinec; Mr. Lemke; Mr. Sandhu; Mr. Stier; and Mr. Webber.

[Government Motion 26 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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