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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 33

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.

Monday, March 11, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray for the wisdom we require to represent those who sent us here and for the strength we require to address the many demands our duties necessitate and for the patience we require to engage in civilized debate with those who may not share our views in this Chamber and beyond. Amen.

Please remain standing now to listen to the wonderful tones of Mr. Paul Lorieau as he guides us in the singing of our national anthem, *O Canada*.

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 very much. Please be seated.

Hon. members, today, as all of you would know, is indeed a very special day in our Assembly. As such, we're going to welcome everyone and give them an opportunity to be seated while I introduce the next topic. Please proceed.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day Message from the Queen

The Speaker: Today is Commonwealth Day, and throughout the world our Commonwealth nations are celebrating with a special message given by Her Majesty the Queen. We have some guests who are here in relation to this event.

Please note that this message from Her Majesty has been placed in writing on each of your desks for your private review and sharing with your constituents. In the meantime allow me to read Opportunity through Enterprise, the message from Her Majesty the Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, on Commonwealth Day 2013.

This year's Commonwealth theme, 'Opportunity through Enterprise', is a celebration of our achievements, particularly those that may have seemed challenging, daunting or even impossible, which have helped to build strength, resilience and pride in our young people, in our communities and in our nations.

Great achievements in human history have a number of common characteristics. From climbing the highest mountain, to winning a sporting competition, making a scientific breakthrough, building a successful business or discovering unique artistic talent – these outcomes all begin as a simple goal or idea in one person's mind.

We are all born with the desire to learn, to explore, to try new things. And each of us can think of occasions when we have been inspired to do something more efficiently, or to assist others in achieving their full potential. Yet it still takes courage to launch into the unknown. Ambition and curiosity open new avenues of opportunity.

That is what lies at the heart of our Commonwealth approach: individuals and communities finding ways to strive together to create a better future that is beneficial for all.

Our shared values of peace, democracy, development, justice and human rights – which are found in our new 'Commonwealth Charter' – mean that we place special emphasis on including everyone in this goal, especially those who are vulnerable.

I am reminded of the adage, 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. As we reflect on how the Commonwealth theme applies to us individually, let us think about what can be gained with a bold heart, dedication, and teamwork. And let us bear in mind the great opportunity that is offered by the Commonwealth – of joining with others, stronger together, for the common good.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Acting Deputy Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this Commonwealth Day 2013 I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House members of the Royal Commonwealth Society, an organization that has had a considerable and positive evolution since its founding in 1868. Founded in 2005, the Edmonton branch is active in promoting a wider appreciation of a modern, progressive, and dynamic Commonwealth and the basic principles for which it stands – tolerance, diversity, freedom, justice, democracy, human rights, and sustainable development – to a generation living in an increasingly interconnected world.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that you spoke at a well-attended and successful RCS Edmonton Commonwealth dinner on Saturday evening. I'd like to introduce the guests that were in attendance. Seated in your gallery are the chair, Joe Zasada; the vice-chair, Dr. John Dugan; vice-chair, Mr. Alex Tsang; treasurer, Dr. John Slade, and his wife, Barbara, also with him; the secretary, Jenni Reiz; and members Earl Chadwick and the Reverend Joshua Phillpotts. I see they've risen. I ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to you all, and thank you yet again for the incredibly wonderful and important work you do. Please be seated.

The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great day for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. We have 30 students here from the Niton school. They are joined by their teachers, Mrs. Varty and Mrs. Verbeek, and a number of parents and helpers. They are seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized by this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dorward: 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 Michael Hamilton, parent helpers Corinne Weeks and Carmen Macdonald, and 37 of Hardisty junior high's best and brightest in my constituency and almost across the street from my home in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I am pleased that they're able to be with us today and take part in conversations regarding the Commonwealth to help them learn more about democracy and the workings of our government. I

would ask now that they please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to the Assembly Mr. Paul Sir, who is the executive director of Basketball Alberta, and Ms Candice Stasynec of the office of the city manager here in Edmonton, both tireless workers on behalf of everybody in the province and particularly in the capital region. Please, the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly 25 students from York academic elementary school. They are visiting our Legislature and are learning a lot about our building and our government. They are future bright leaders of this beautiful province of Alberta, Canada. These grade 6 students along with their teacher, Ms Dora Strasdin, are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise before you today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a large group of students from Woodbridge Farms elementary school. They are some of Sherwood Park's brightest and best and our leaders for tomorrow. Accompanying them are many teachers and volunteers: Anita Sisson, Christina Ganert, Antonia Triska, Mona Sawatzky, Antonia Tiede, Judy Andrekson, Linda Holan, Richard Bylsma, and Tyson Parker, who is a grandson of one of Strathcona county's very famous reeves. I would like them all to rise today and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a very special person, Dr. John Dugan. Dr. Dugan is sitting up in your gallery. He has been a friend of mine and a supporter for the past 13 years. He is a very passionate Albertan who questions everything and has some very sage advice for me always. He has been honoured for his role in St. John's Ambulance. He is a member of the Monarchist League and of the Commonwealth association. You can see the row of medals that he proudly wears on his chest, proclaiming his honour, his duty, and his loyalty to our country and our province. Dr. Dugan is also a veterinarian with whom my dogs, Abby and Tikka, are very familiar. Dr. Dugan has risen. Would you please join me in giving him the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nizam Saab and Zeki El-Hakim. Nizam is the president of the Yanta Cultural Society here in Edmonton, and Mr. Hakim is a history teacher and principal of the Yanta elementary school in Lebanon who has many connections here in Canada and many former students who now reside in Canada. Speaking with Mr. Hakim, he tells me that Canada is his second home. They are both seated in the members' gallery. If I could ask everybody to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a wonderful friend and a community leader who is seated in the public gallery. Her name is Marilyn Gunn. Marilyn is the president and CEO of the Community Kitchen Program in Calgary. I'll be recognizing her contributions shortly in a member's statement. I ask that Marilyn please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have another introduction. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a friend of mine and a friend of Alberta's natural lands and environment, Greg Wagner. Greg is a professional biologist and a well-respected authority on Alberta's grassland ecosystems. Greg is here today accompanied by his mother, Eleanor Wagner, and by Taylor Wagner. They will be touring the Legislature for the first time. They've come today to show their support for grasslands preservation in Bill 202. I ask that Greg, Eleanor, and Taylor rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Marilyn Gunn

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I want to salute today an outstanding volunteer and community leader who is a friend of mine and a constituent of mine in the electoral district of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. Her name is Marilyn Gunn. I've known Marilyn for over eight years and have grown to admire her courage and her tenacity in tackling the tough social issues in our community. Marilyn is a faithful and valued member of her church community, and her faith guides everything she does as she dedicates herself to help those who are less fortunate.

Marilyn together with her husband, Bill Gunn, founded the highly successful Community Kitchen Program in Calgary, which helps families to help themselves through collective grocery shopping and group preparation of meals, at the same time providing knowledge about good nutrition and cooking. Over the past 21 years this program has helped supply tens of thousands of nourishing and economical meals for low-income Calgary families.

Marilyn recognizes the fact that government alone cannot respond to all of the social needs of the less fortunate in our city and that progress is best made by partnerships between the government, private corporations, and community-based charities and their dedicated volunteers. Marilyn routinely volunteers for many community projects and has fostered co-operation among like-minded Calgary charities, leading to efficiencies in delivering social programs such as the Storehouse-39-3-10 project in northeast Calgary.

Several years ago Marilyn faced a struggle with serious illness and overcame the odds to make a full recovery. While this event may have caused most of us to reassess our life priorities and to perhaps take more personal time, Marilyn immediately returned to her usual busy schedule of volunteering and helping others.

Marilyn has been recognized for her outstanding contributions to her province and her country by being awarded the Alberta centennial medal and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, last week this government introduced a shocking back-in-debt budget. To understand how

shocking, we need to review our province's recent history. Unlike the Premier, who didn't spend very much time in Alberta during the 1990s and early 2000s and, therefore, has no credibility when she complains about how awful it was to live here during that time – let me fill her in a bit. Growing up in Alberta at that time was great. The schools I attended were excellent. In fact, I received almost a year of free credits at a U.S. college just because I was an Alberta grad. The economy was strong and creating jobs. Businesses were flourishing, and home values were appreciating.

As a province we had a collective purpose. The majority of us were united in our goal to pay off our provincial debt and build a job-creating machine through low taxes and job-friendly policies that we proudly called the Alberta advantage. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the entire direction of our nation was profoundly altered for the better by our relatively small but principled and feisty province during that time. But as the Premier often says: that was then, and this is now.

In 2008 our province had almost no debt and a \$17 billion rainy-day fund. By election 2016 we will have a \$17 billion debt and no rainy-day fund. The Premier contends that anyone who doesn't feel we should go back into debt is an extremist, yet right before the 2012 election she stated, and I quote: Alberta does not have a debt, and we will not incur debt; that is fundamental to what Albertans are proud of, and we are committed to making sure that that continues. Unquote. How very extreme of you, Premier.

The ugly truth is that this Premier's views on structural debt have been discredited by the lessons of the ongoing world debt crisis. It is she and her party that are taking us back a generation. It is she and her party that have proved to be fiscally extreme. The good news is that Albertans now know that.

Thank you.

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

Budget 2013 Benefits

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to represent the residents of Calgary-Glenmore and to speak up on their behalf. I rise today to share with this Assembly constituent issues that were addressed in the budget tabled last week.

Families are welcoming the \$5 million commitment for an insulin pump therapy program for eligible Albertans with type 1 diabetes. Parents of newborn babies, 5,000 of which were born in Calgary-Glenmore, are thrilled with the \$8 million investment in early childhood development, especially the inclusion of a universal newborn hearing screening program. Patients and health care workers are supportive of the \$65 million investment for an Alberta electronic health record project. One of those health care workers told me that he'd rather have that project completed than a new piece of fancy equipment.

Those stuck in traffic are encouraged by the \$51 million for GreenTRIP allocated to Calgary.

For the senior population whom I'm honoured to represent the property tax deferral program will provide assistance. For students in the classroom there is \$248 million in class size initiatives and \$50 million for student health services. For those concerned about water supply and the environment, there is a \$25 million commitment to the water for life strategy.

To the many constituents who called my office, who e-mailed my office, who snail-mailed my office, and who came into the office and were absolutely adamant that this government control spending and not increase taxes, I say: we did it. To the residents of Calgary-Glenmore: this party and this government heard your priorities to continue to build Alberta by investing in family and

communities, to live within our means, and to continue working to ensure that our resources get to market.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Reporting

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in its first postelection budget this government has saddled future generations with billions of dollars in new debt. Now, I'll get to the issue of exactly how much debt in just a minute, but there is no question that we are back in debt. The problem is that the government's new way of calculating and presenting the numbers has resulted in a wide range of estimates for this year's annual deficit. Will the Premier give us one number today for the total cash shortfall for this year? By that, I mean the difference between what they'll take in and what they'll spend.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that question because one of the things that I've been most pleased about is the fact that we've been able, as I promised in this House last week, to be completely clear and transparent with respect to our fiscal situation. We have an operating account, we have a capital account, and for the first time in 25 years we have a savings account. It is very clear. We have said to Albertans that we have a \$451 million shortfall, which will be covered by the sustainability fund. That is the answer to the question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, that's not the answer to the question. I'm going to make this super easy for the Premier. I just need three numbers. What's the total revenue the government will take in this year, what is the total amount of money the government will spend this year, and what is the difference between the two?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what they're asking about is: what is the cash requirement included in the budget documents totally around the savings, the capital plan, and the operating plan? We don't consider that putting money back into Treasury Branches is part of a deficit. We don't consider that student loan financing is part of a deficit. We don't consider that the savings that we're putting aside is part of a deficit. It is irresponsible; it is ignorant of accounting to even come up with the question.

Ms Smith: Well, speaking of ignorant of accounting, given that the Premier and her Finance minister claim their new budget presents the fiscal picture accurately and given that accounting standards say that when you report the numbers, when you change the way you report the numbers in a budget, you're supposed to actually restate the previous year's in the new format, why wasn't the historical fiscal summary table in the budget, and when can we expect to see an apples-to-apples comparison?

Mr. Horner: You know what, Mr. Speaker? We are not hiding the fact that we are changing how we present the budget. In fact, in this province we force municipalities to separate operating from capital and provide us with the savings. Do you know why we do that? Because we lend to them. We lend to them a lot. We want to make sure that what they're spending on operating is operating and what they're spending on capital is capital. Shouldn't Albertans have the same right?

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Well, hopefully, the Auditor General will be able to give us an answer to my last question because the Finance minister couldn't.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, all of that deficit money and all of that borrowing is why we in the Official Opposition call this the back-in-debt budget. Now, by the end of the next fiscal year there will be an additional 3 and a half billion dollars or so in new debt, and the government is draining our savings by an additional \$2 billion. By the time of the next election their total debt just for capital will be \$17 billion. What is the plan to have that \$17 billion paid in full?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that we said to Albertans that this was going to be a tough budget, and despite that, we held the line at a zero per cent increase in spending. Within that, the answer to the hon. member's question is that a year from now we're going to have more schools, we're going to have family care clinics, we're going to have hospitals, we're going to have roads, and we're going to have irrigation systems because that's what builds Alberta. That's why Albertans decided that they would trust us with building this province. It is a long-term view, it is for generations to come, and that is what a Progressive Conservative government is getting straight.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I can see why the Premier doesn't want to answer the question. She doesn't actually have a debt repayment plan. The debt repayment plan that this Premier is proposing does almost nothing to pay down the \$17 billion debt. In 2016, for instance, this budget will allocate only a paltry \$200 million to principal, kind of like making the minimum payment on a credit card. Does the Premier know that if she only pays the bare minimum, it will take 85 years for her to pay off her \$17 billion debt?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard about this 85 years today, and I was kind of curious about where they came up with that number. Now I understand where they came up with the number, a very simple extrapolation of one number out of the budget, kind of the way they built their budget, an extrapolation of a whole bunch of numbers that I have no idea what they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, within the fiscal plan itself we talk about matching debt repayment amounts to their maturity profile. We said we would borrow for highway 63. We said we'd do it over 20 years. We will pay it back over 20 years. We have a debt repayment plan. We're going to set dollars aside. The hon. member should do her homework and read the budget.

Ms Smith: I did read the budget, Mr. Speaker, and they're not putting away nearly enough to be able to pay off this debt in a lesser period of time. I look forward to seeing the full plan.

Mr. Speaker, that \$17 billion does need to be paid off somehow, sometime. For instance, in 2016 they expect to pay \$600 million in interest on that debt, which is three times the amount that is going to go to the principal payments. Even if they never incur another dollar of debt, it still might take three or even four generations to pay it off. Is this what the Premier meant when she said that this was a budget for the generations?

Mr. Horner: You know what, Mr. Speaker? What Albertans understand is that when they go in to talk to their banker, the

banker wants to know among other things: can you pay your monthly bills every month? What do you have at the end of every month? Second, what is your net worth? Is it going up or down? I would refer the hon. member, because she said she's read the budget, which I doubt, to page 135. At the bottom is the net assets for fiscal policy purposes. It's going up. The net worth of this province will be more than \$44 billion when this plan is done. We'll have a debt repayment plan, and we're building the schools, hospitals, and roads that Albertans need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Postsecondary Education System Autonomy

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. My questions are for the Premier. Our postsecondary institutions received quite a blow in this last budget. Not only did the government break another promise on increasing postsecondary funding; it also slashed funding considerably in the process. It's yet another example of saying one thing before the election and doing another after the election. We have put the leaders of tomorrow and those that instruct them in a precarious situation. To the Premier: are you not concerned that this is going to have a negative impact on our classrooms and the quality of education that Alberta students receive?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, from my perspective the government of Alberta is the custodian of taxpayers' money. Our view is that we want to get the best services possible for that money, and the view of this government on our postsecondary policy is that that means we want to ensure that universities are investing in research and innovation that leads to development of our economy and to training people who can be skilled to compete in the economy. We have been very clear with our postsecondary institutions with respect to that. We've set out a policy that allows them to make those decisions to ensure that that happens. That's what allows for economic growth, and that is what will put us on the path to success.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, adding to the frustration is the fact that the Minister of Education has promised a mandate letter in which he is going to explain to our great leaders and academics how they should conduct themselves. Given that the government loves to centralize – we know they've done it in land planning, they have done it in health care, and they are trying to do it in ambulance service – again I ask the Premier: do you really believe that you and your government know how to run postsecondary institutions better than those that are currently running them?

Ms Redford: First of all, the hon. member should not be presupposing anything with respect to a mandate letter. We are in constant dialogue with leaders of 26 postsecondary institutions across this province to make sure that we are seeing excellence in education. What we've been very clear about, Mr. Speaker, is that we want to ensure that we're going to be able to train people and to focus on research and innovation that is directly relevant to economic growth, partnering with industry, partnering with businesses, to ensure that we can grow and diversify the economy. That is what we ask our postsecondary leaders to do.

2:00

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, postsecondary independence and autonomy are at the heart of true democracy, and from your Commonwealth letter that you read today, "Ambition and curiosity open new avenues of opportunity." So I would again ask

the Premier: can you assure us all today that these mandate letters will pose no threat to academic freedom and that our post-secondary institutions will continue to pursue research free of any of your government's intervention?

The Speaker: Hon. member, that would be Her Majesty the Queen's honourable message, but proceed.

Ms Redford: A very honourable message, Mr. Speaker, which, of course, we agree with.

I guess that on March 11, 2013, this will be the bogeyman of the day. There is no doubt that postsecondary institutions matter. The relationship that we have with postsecondary institutions has allowed our economy to thrive. We're going to continue to ensure that happens, Mr. Speaker. We are going to make sure that the research that is done, that Alberta taxpayers invest in, is relevant to economic growth in this province.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of the bogeyman, Alberta's combined postsecondary tuition and mandatory noninstructional fees are amongst the highest in the country, which helps to explain why Alberta has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country. In the budget speech we heard a lot of rhetoric about preparing Alberta for the future. To the Premier. Your budget featured the biggest cuts to postsecondary education in decades. While most Albertans consider education an investment, it's clear that you consider it a cost. Can you please explain how gutting postsecondary funding prepares Alberta for the future?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the exciting parts about the budget speech last week was when the Minister of Finance talked about the fact that it's important to take an approach to working with our campuses across this province to ensure that we're investing in economic growth, research, and innovation. There is no doubt that we want to give every student in this province the opportunity to succeed, and that is one of the reasons that we have more combined bursary and student loan money available to students in this province than the rest of the country combined. This is what will lead to economic growth and success. This is what students have asked for, and we're going to ensure that it happens.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, apparently, the Premier is alleging that they weren't getting the institutions to work together in the first place.

Premier, your ideologically extreme devotion to trickle-down economics means burdens are trickling down to students and their families. Student leaders tell me that your deep cuts will negatively impact class sizes, already so full that students have to sit on the floor, and that when they graduate, they have an average debt of \$27,000. To the Premier: how is that helping Alberta prepare for the future?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, one of the great things about our opportunities in this province is that we're always prepared to have conversations about how to improve processes, and when that happens, we're able to see further opportunities for success. There is no doubt that doing things differently is sometimes challenging for people to understand. We've certainly seen that in the past couple of weeks in terms of this debate. I'll tell you that

we are committed to ensuring that we are investing taxpayers' dollars in research, in innovation, and in excellence internationally so that we can compete, grow this economy, and provide jobs for students.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, gutting Education Alberta is not doing things differently.

Alberta's postsecondary students have a desire to work in the summer to help pay their way through school and get that all-important first job. For decades the summer temporary employment program, or STEP, has helped students, the nonprofit sector, and small business. Premier, cancelling STEP is the ultimate in penny-wise and pound-foolish. Will you at least correct one mistake and restore STEP funding?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, a little bit of a historic lesson although I was only seven years old. The STEP program was started in 1972 when we had high student unemployment. The unemployment rate in Alberta varies day to day but is essentially 4 and a half per cent. We have students and people that are participating in the economy and the not-for-profit sector who are quite able to find employment opportunities without the STEP program. Now, there is also no doubt that STEP has been fundamental to the not-for-profit sector. The Minister for Human Services has already met with stakeholders about how to design a program that is appropriate, not a crutch from over 40 years ago.

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

Mr. Mason: Wow. A crutch. A crutch: the STEP program.

Trust in Government

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I have here a campaign advertisement for the Progressive Conservative Party in the last election. Headline: No New Taxes, No Service Cuts. It contains a pledge by the Premier, signed by the Premier, that there will be no service cuts. My question is to the Premier. Now that she's broken her promise not to cut the services that Alberta families depend on, will she admit that the whole PC re-election campaign was a desperate and cynical attempt to mislead Albertans in order to cling to power?

The Speaker: Hon. member, please be careful where we go. You know it's against the rules to raise questions about political parties and political fundraising, so we'll listen carefully.

Meanwhile, hon. Premier, I invite you to answer.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, not as desperate and cynical as that question was.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that we had to make tough choices in this budget. With a hundred thousand new people coming to this province, we were able to keep spending to zero per cent. We were able to ensure that we did not make across-the-board cuts, that we did not raise taxes, that we invested in a savings plan, that we protected vulnerable people, and that we continue to build this province. Now, that is a record that we are proud of. It's a commitment we made to Albertans, and we're glad to be able to keep it.

Mr. Mason: I suppose closing the Michener Centre was taking away a crutch as well.

Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand the NDP list of top 10 broken promises contained in this budget. Given that this Premier insisted on Friday that she did not break her promises to the Albertans that

voted for her and given that we the New Democrats could easily come up with 10 significant broken promises from this Premier, can she explain to Albertans how this PC government did not betray their trust?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's been pretty wonderful this weekend to be able to speak to people throughout southern Alberta, throughout Calgary and Edmonton about the budget on Thursday. What was really interesting to me was the fact that a lot of people said: "Look. We know that times change, but you kept your word. You made tough choices. We knew you were going to make tough choices." But as we promised, we did it in a thoughtful way and a responsible manner.

I'd like to ask the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities to supplement with respect to the Michener Centre.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had taken the time to read the budget, he would have noticed that we have an increase in the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, perhaps in the next supplemental you'll have that chance.

Meanwhile, the time has run out, and we go on to the third question from the leader.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's amazing to me how the Premier can break almost every promise she made and stand in this House and say that she kept her trust with Albertans. Albertans just can't trust this PC government to stand up to protect the services they need. Given that the Premier's government is gutting our postsecondary institutions and denying schools the stable, predictable funding they were promised, will the Premier do the right thing and keep one promise, which was to make sure that we have adequate revenues to pay for the programs we need? Why do you refuse to do that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, if we take a look at the state of the world this month compared to the state of the world six months ago, what we see is that Albertans said to us: "Continue to move forward on a path for success. Continue to build this province. Ensure that you are providing services to vulnerable people, ensure that you are building schools, ensure that you're supporting the public sector, and make sure that you're being responsible with taxpayer dollars." Now, that's a tall order, but in the past six months we have been able to keep those commitments, which is a fine distinction from anyone on the opposition side who comes up with theoretical documents that are meaningless.

2:10

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the numbers for this back-in-debt budget are bad enough: new deficits, new borrowing, new debts, squandered savings, plundered heritage fund. It is a grim fiscal picture. And the trust picture for this government is equally bad. The list of broken promises is long and growing. Of course, the Premier promised a balanced budget: nope. Of course, we were promised no debt: nope. Stable, predictable school board funding: nope. Hospitals in Sherwood Park and Whitecourt: uh-uh. Why won't this Premier acknowledge that she has not kept her word?

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to invite you on Wednesday to not use any preambles as an experiment. [interjections] It's been my observation over many years that preambles lead to a number of complicated things when they are accompanied –

excuse me; excuse me – by supplementals. Okay. Supplementary questions ought not. I was listening to the previous exchange, not this one that we're engaged in right now, and I wanted to bring it to your attention now to give you lots of warning. On Wednesday let's try and get away with no preambles ahead of supplementals.

Meanwhile could we have someone, the minister or the Premier, to answer this first question?

Trust in Government (continued)

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, last April, on the 23rd, we promised Albertans that we would build this province, that we would build schools, that we would build postsecondary institutions, that we would ensure that we have public services available for vulnerable Albertans. We have kept that promise, we are proud of that promise, and that is why a Progressive Conservative government can be trusted to support building the future of this province.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, given the length of the list of broken promises we can understand why it is that Albertans have lost trust in this government. Capital projects like the twinning of highway 881, social programs like full-day kindergarten, and a recreational tax credit for seniors: promises broken. Why won't the Premier just admit she can't keep her promises?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, both of the last questions have a premise demanding balanced budgets but also demanding new projects be spent. It's hypocritical to demand both. But I have a long list here of promises made and kept. Building family care clinics in 2013: \$235 million for 40 of them. Promise made, promise kept. Funding insulin pumps: \$5 million for new insulin pump therapy. Promise made, promise kept. Improved pharmacare: a new pharmacare program that will provide access to drugs and supplemental health benefit coverage to all Albertans. A promise made, a promise kept.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, when a government promises to balance the budget and doesn't, promises to stay out of debt and doesn't, promises to raise the bar on accountability and transparency and does none of it, why should anyone continue to believe anything this Premier and this government say?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, in this government, which I think Albertans are fortunate for, we don't adhere to an extreme ideology that means we can't be responsive and reflective in times of need. Albertans in the last election, in April 2013 decided that they wanted a government that was going to hold the line on spending, which we did at zero per cent; continue to invest in families and communities, which we're continuing to do from one end of the province to the other. We're continuing to find access to new markets for our goods so that we can continue to grow this province and provide good jobs to Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's Commonwealth Day. Let's show some class in this Chamber, please.

Let's go on with Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Prescription Drug Coverage

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing about cuts to drug costs and drug programs, and I've met with

pharmacists and had conversations with pharmacists on the phone. To the Minister of Health: can you explain why you are reducing the prices of generic drugs even though the move affects the income of the pharmacists, especially the small-town pharmacists?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are reducing generic drug prices in Alberta because we made a commitment to responsible change in health care. Alberta has lagged behind most of the rest of the country in terms of setting prices for generic drugs. The changes that were announced earlier in the budget will benefit not only government in terms of the sponsored drug programs that we offer; they also benefit private plans, employer-sponsored plans, and people who pay out of pocket.

Mr. Dorward: To the same minister: given the high cost of those drugs he mentioned, can you explain how you plan to extend pharmacare to all Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll thank the hon. member for the question because it's important, of course, not to consider only the price of generic drugs in the question of how we expand drug coverage to all Albertans. Pharmacare will bring all of government's drug programs and health benefit programs together under one roof. It will offer for the first time drug coverage to the 20 per cent of Albertans who have no coverage today. It will deliver more for less money, and it will deliver a more equitable degree of drug coverage to all of our citizens.

Mr. Dorward: If you're introducing income testing into that, doesn't that mean that the seniors that live in Gold Bar may end up paying more for their drugs than they do now?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the laudable goal of extending drug coverage to the 20 per cent of Albertans who have none today does of course mean that those who can afford to pay a little more may be asked to pay a little more. But I would think that most hon. members in this House would agree that one of the tenets of publicly funded health care, which this government supports and leads in Canada, is that we provide an equitable level of access to all Albertans for the things they depend on most, and that includes drugs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Red Deer-North.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 26 the Minister of Education, in response to a question about releasing an infrastructure priority list, said in this House: "We actually do publish the lists. The lists are online of all the projects that are approved." We've never been able to find it, so we FOIPed it. The FOIP came, confirming that indeed such a list does exist but that, quote, it must be withheld. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why are you hiding this secret list from hard-working Albertans, who need to know when their schools, hospitals, and roads are being built?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, our priority list is our capital plan, and it is posted on the website for Infrastructure. Any project that's under way and has been approved is posted on the website. It would be irresponsible to post projects that have not yet been approved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a priority list

does indeed exist and the government is just hiding it and given that hard-working Albertans have a right to know what the government's infrastructure plans are and where their tax money is being spent, when will this government have the courage to tell the truth and stop playing politics by tabling this list?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the list is posted on our website, so I don't know how that can be hiding it or keeping it a secret. I've gone there and checked. It's there.

We continue to invest in public infrastructure to ensure Albertans have the quality of life they deserve now and into the future. Our government works hard to deliver the right infrastructure projects at the right places at the right time in a cost-effective manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No wonder Albertans just don't trust this government. They won't come clean on how they are spending taxpayers' dollars. Given that the Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation's mandate is to assist with the responsibilities related to access to information, will that minister do his job and order the release of this list?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, this government is delivering an open and transparent government. We are delivering it. We have the toughest expense disclosure policy in Canada. That's a promise delivered. We are delivering on the Premier's mandate to have to the most open and transparent government. We have whistleblower legislation. We are conducting a review of FOIP. This is delivering to Albertans the open and transparent government that they have asked us to deliver.

Transition of Michener Centre Residents

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, for over 50 years Michener Centre in Red Deer-North has been home for people with developmental disabilities. Some of the residents of Michener have lived there for 50 years and along with their parents and guardians have chosen to stay there. Michener is their home. Today our government announced that Michener's north and south facilities are being closed. Parents and guardians are very concerned. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities. How are you going to ensure that the very vulnerable residents of Michener Centre, some of whom need very specialized care, will receive the high level of care that they require once they are moved?

2:20

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the changes that we announced today at the Michener Centre are indeed, I'll acknowledge, gut wrenching for the families and loved ones of people there, but we intend to make changes there that will improve the quality of life and the outcomes for the residents. We already have a fleet of group home community living facilities that can handle a full spectrum of high health needs and high behavioural needs, and we will assess each of those patients individually and put them in proper settings.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have known for many years that Michener would eventually be closed, but why is the government taking this action now, when there are still 230 residents?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the facility once housed 2,400 people. It now houses 230 or so, about 100 of whom are in the group home setting, and those ones will remain, so we're talking about 125 residents here. It's just at the point where the buildings are

old, it's just not an up-to-date model of care, and it's time to move those patients into a proper setting and achieve better outcomes for them.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, given that the highly trained staff of Michener have cared for these residents for many years and 50 have reached the golden years and are now seniors, what will happen to the staff who have worked at Michener for many years?

Mr. Oberle: Well, I thank the hon. member for the question because it's obviously a very important part of our planning here. We're expecting that about 75 of the staff will be redeployed in the service agency sector. [interjection] We think somewhere around 50 will be redeployed within our ministry. Mr. Speaker, we care deeply about the staff there and the care that they've given over the years, and they're to be congratulated for their service.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I do have you on the list.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Hehr: Future Albertans, future children and grandchildren of this province, call the cops; you've been robbed. Actually, robbed is too generous a term. This hasn't been a rank-and-file break and enter or minor shoplifting offence. You have been the victim of grand larceny of the highest order. It's on par with the scam pulled by Bernie Madoff, and it makes the Great Train Robbery look like child's play. With the release of the budget we have learned that over the last 25 years this province has taken in and spent virtually \$150 billion in resource revenue. Does the President of Treasury Board think this has been wise stewardship of our resource revenue?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of this Premier's direction in creating legislation that will save nonrenewable resource revenue moving forward. I'm also very proud that over the past 15 years this government has spent over \$72 billion on the infrastructure that those very Albertans will be using in future generations and are using today because they want their schools, they want their hospitals, they want their roads, and they want them there when they need them, not sometime in the future to defer some number.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be reminded that questions ought not be hypothetical, and they ought not seek opinion. If we could rephrase accordingly.

Mr. Hehr: Given that virtually every economist over the last 25 years has stated unequivocally that we need to raise revenues to ensure that this intergenerational theft that has occurred is not repeated, why, despite the overwhelming body of research that says that the right thing to do is to raise revenue, has this government refused to rework our tax code?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, I would take issue with his comment about every economist having said to raise taxes; they haven't. I would also say that the benefit that Albertans have reaped from the nonrenewable resource revenue is the fact that we have no net financial debt for this province. It's the fact that we have the lowest taxes in the land. It's the fact that we have no sales tax. It's the fact that we have \$41 billion of net financial assets for every Albertan. That's better than anywhere else, I would suggest, per capita in North America. That's been a huge

benefit, and it will benefit future generations because of the financial stability it creates.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that the President of Treasury Board obviously considers these economists to be off their rockers, does this government believe that two former Finance ministers, Mr. Morton and Mr. Liepert, former minister Mel Knight, and chief of staff Lee Richardson have all stated that additional taxes need to be raised in this province, or does he consider these people to merely be fearmongering?

Mr. Horner: No. Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I value their opinions greatly, just as I valued all of the opinions of the Albertans who told us: check and live within your means before you dig into my pocket again. And that's exactly what we did.

I'll give you an economist's opinion. This is a quote from Ben Brunnen, chief economist with the Calgary chamber: the approach of using debt to finance capital is actually a prudent one in the sense that these infrastructure assets last decades, and it makes – get this, Mr. Speaker – good sense to finance them over their useful life. There's an economist. I wholeheartedly agree with his opinion on that one.

Prescription Drug Coverage (continued)

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier pretty much breaks every promise she makes. For instance, the Premier promised to support seniors but instead chose to hit vulnerable Albertans by forcing most seniors to pay more for prescription drugs. The sicker you are, the more you pay. To the Minister of the Health: will the minister admit that his new pharmacare program is simply manipulative marketing of clawbacks that will hurt Alberta seniors?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the hon. member fails to acknowledge in her question that the concept of fair pharmacare was in fact pioneered by the New Democratic government in British Columbia 10 years ago. She further fails to acknowledge that 20 per cent of Albertans today have absolutely no drug coverage at all. What pharmacare will deliver is not a drug program that's based on your age, where you live in Alberta, or what government ministry delivers your program. It will deliver coverage based on your need and, to the extent that you can contribute, your ability to contribute.

Ms Notley: You're asking sick seniors to pay for this change rather than wealthy Albertans.

Given that this budget cuts hundreds of millions of dollars by reducing drug benefits, cutting property tax assessment, and limiting eligibility for the seniors' benefit, does the minister truly believe that a chronically ill senior who lives on \$30,000 a year is really the fair person to ask to pay for this government's fiscal mismanagement.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the former New Democratic government of the province of British Columbia certainly proved successfully that the pharmacare approach can deliver an equitable access to drug coverage for an entire population, including those who have the ability to pay and those who do not. We haven't released any details yet about the income thresholds that would be involved or any of the other details that might allow someone to make an informed judgment or proffer an opinion as to whether or not they believe this is fair to all concerned. We will do that

toward the end of the year, and the hon. member would be welcome to ask her questions at that time.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's already said that he's going to cut almost \$200 million from the program, so we can draw some conclusions.

Now, given that this minister isn't just breaking the promises the Premier made last year but even the one he made this morning on the radio and given that honest answers are just one of the many victims of this budget, will the minister tell us why this government finds it so easy to break promises to seniors but so hard to ask corporations and the wealthy to pay their fair share?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the hon. member in addition to my response to her previous questions: if she and her party truly believe in universal publicly funded health care for Albertans and for Canadians, that treats people based on their health care need and not on their ability to pay, then she should be embracing this program, she should be celebrating the success that they've seen in British Columbia over a decade, and she should be defending this initiative to all Albertans as a way to improve our public health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

New Hospital Construction

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's back-in-debt budget is full of broken promises and shows we can no longer believe what they say. Just two weeks ago this Premier told constituents in Sherwood Park that her government was committed to the new hospital, but on Thursday the Premier scrapped the project. In Whitecourt a new hospital that had been promised for 20 years and promised by the Premier in the last election has also been delayed. Can the Infrastructure minister explain to these communities why their priorities are no longer this government's priorities now that we're no longer in an election?

Mr. Horne: What this government is committed to is delivering a comprehensive range of health care services based on the needs of the communities we serve. In the case of Sherwood Park, Mr. Speaker, residents are going to enjoy a first-class health care facility delivering a broad range of primary health care services 24/7, urgent care services, and all in a location that is less than 30 minutes for most residents from major downtown hospitals.

The Premier did deliver on her promise as well to the residents of Whitecourt; \$10 million has been allocated in this budget for planning and design for a replacement hospital in that facility, which is needed, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this minister needs to do is quit reading his briefing book and start talking to Albertans.

Given that this government promised a new hospital to the people of Sherwood Park, to be completed in 2009, and given that the Health minister now claims that an AHS needs assessment says that the hospital is not needed, will the Minister of Infrastructure please explain how a hospital that was supposedly not needed was ever approved and partially constructed?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this Premier and this government clearly delivered to Albertans when we allocated a

3 per cent increase in this budget, or just under half a billion dollars, to expand health care services in this province. That's speaking directly to Albertans about their priorities and showing them how those are reflected in this budget.

With respect to the facility in Sherwood Park, as I've stated before, we are meeting the needs of those residents, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member wants to hang on to the notion of in-patient care as the only way to deliver services Albertans rely on, then I suggest to her that she has a seriously outdated notion of what primary health care entails.

Mrs. Forsyth: What the government originally promised was a 4.5 per cent increase on a five-year commitment.

Given that the Premier promised the people of Whitecourt a new hospital but there is only \$10 million given to the project over the next three years, will the Associate Minister of Seniors explain to the citizens of Whitecourt why they are not getting the new hospital they have been promised since the election in 1993?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that we have the recognition in the budget for the new project. Before you do any project, any of us knows – it's well known – that you need to do engineering, you need to do planning, you need to do functional planning, and you need to do site work. I'm sure that the \$5 million in this year's budget and the \$5 million in next year's budget will address that so that the following year we can put the money in the budget to build it.

CRTC Wireless Code of Conduct

Mr. Quadri: Mr. Speaker, cellphones and other wireless mobile devices are so prevalent in Alberta that many households do not even have a land line. The problem is that it's very hard for Albertans to compare contracts and decide what is best for them. Data and roaming charges are not very clear. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what are you doing to protect wireless consumers from billing confusion?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for that question. I pressed the CRTC and Industry Canada to move forth with a national code to protect wireless consumers from coast to coast in this country. I'm very pleased that they responded to my request. They initiated hearings on this issue, and just about two weeks ago I put forth a number of recommendations to the CRTC. It's my hope that they'll move forth with a new national code by the end of this year.

Mr. Quadri: I'm glad to hear that the CRTC finally decided it's worth considering.

Again to the Minister of Service Alberta: what are you doing to make sure that Alberta consumers are heard during this consultation?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, once again, I was the only provincial minister from across the country to actually put forth recommendations on this. Some of the things that I'm pushing for are to notify consumers free of charge when they're about to incur additional charges, have plain-language contracts, use consistent units of data consumption, limit cancellation fees, and ensure cellphones are unlocked when you get them.

Mr. Quadri: If the CRTC draws up a national code and does not address Alberta's problems, what are you going to do to make

sure they heard our concerns and protect Albertans with this national code?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that I was the first provincial minister in Canada to push for this and that they responded to my request and initiated hearings, I've got their commitment that they're going to move forward with a national code by the end of this year. Now, in the rare event that they don't continue to follow my request, you better believe we'll be ready to take action, bring in legislative or regulatory changes here in Alberta to make sure that Albertans are protected. But through this route I'm hoping all Canadians will be protected as a result of Alberta's initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Medevac Services

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moving life-saving medevac services will result in deaths, suffering, and reduced health outcomes for thousands of northern Albertans. You don't have to take my word for it. There are now over 80 doctors who have signed a letter stating that the Premier's relocation plan is flawed and will result in "needless deaths and disability" for northern Albertans. Now, I know the Premier is no fan of doctors, but to continue to ignore their advice is spiteful. Will the Minister of Infrastructure do the right thing, listen to the 80 doctors, and just delay the relocation of medevac services past March 15?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the Premier of this province does listen to physicians and has listened to all points of view and all of the evidence that's been put together to plan the move of the medevac service to the Edmonton International. The opposition can say what they want. The fact of the matter is that this move has been in the plans for over a year now. It's based on evidence by the independent Health Quality Council of Alberta. There have been well over 65 flights already directly to the new centre at the international, and we stand by this decision as one that will continue to deliver on quality and patient safety as job one in medevac.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier's video and robocalls to over 200,000 Albertans stated incorrectly that the City Centre Airport is functionally closed on March 15, incorrectly stated that only five critical patients are transferred a month, and incorrectly stated that emergency health services for northern Albertans will not be compromised, does the Premier just not know the facts, or is she not prepared to do the right thing, to truly lead for once and protect health services for all northern Albertans?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, our Premier and our Minister of Health have been showing stellar leadership through this event. The airport may stay open for a bit longer, but the city has already declared that it will be closing and could close it at any time, which is why it's very important, as our Minister of Health indicated, to move the medevac now so that we can be preemptive and make sure we have all the services in place, before it becomes a critical situation, to deliver the same or better medevac care services to northern Albertans, just like they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has refused to implement several of the Health Quality Council recommendations, including the construction of a dedicated overpass and the installation of an ambulance lane on the QE II, is it not clear that the government's premature closure of life-saving medevac services on Friday is unnecessary, costly, and will have fatal consequences for northern Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member says is not true. This government has accepted all 18 recommendations and is moving forward on implementing all 18 recommendations. The opinions that the hon. member proposes represent a lack of understanding of the evidence and, I would suggest, almost a deliberate attempt to scare Albertans, who should have no reason to be concerned about quality and patient safety. Unlike the Official Opposition, this government will not wait until the day after the municipal airport closes to take responsible action on medevac.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Smoky River Bridge Demolition

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An abandoned railway bridge in my constituency that crossed the Smoky River near Watino gave way during demolition, leaving a large part of the bridge in the river. This bridge now lies just under the water's surface and, with varying water flow throughout the year, poses various threats to navigation. My question is to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Would you please inform the House as to the progress that is being made in removing this bridge from the Smoky River?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly thank the member for this question. I want to recognize the concerns that the county has but also that this member has about the safe and enjoyable use of the Smoky River. Work is ongoing, and we've made several attempts to remove the truss. However, there have been a number of weather-related incidents and challenges, including high water levels and ice conditions, which have slowed the progress, but our department continues to work with CN so that we can ensure that this will get done as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that this bridge in question was a private railway bridge, who in the end will pay for the removal of the bridge from the Smoky River?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another great question from the member. Canadian National Railway is the owner of the bridge, and they are the ones that are responsible for the removal and the associated costs as well. It's not the taxpayers of Alberta that will pay for this. It is the Canadian National Railway that is responsible for these costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:40

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of

Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: given that this bridge segment has been in the river for a number of years now, will you consider taking a compliance action under the Water Act and/or the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to ensure that this work is done as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Our staff have been working with CN and its contractors, and I am pleased to say that progress is being made. We fully expect that the truss section will be removed before the end of summer, but I do want to make sure that this member knows as well that if it becomes necessary, my department will consider taking compliance action.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to proceed with Members' Statements in just a moment, and I'll give you 30 seconds. However, in the meantime could we have unanimous consent to revert to a brief introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 26 guests from my constituency, including members from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills Wildrose Constituency Association Board of Directors. We have quite the mix on our board. Half are under 35, and half are women. There are also a few other visitors and some family members. These passionate individuals put their time, energy, and resources into getting this Wildrose MLA elected. Without their continued support and dedication I could not do what I do. I'm truly grateful. I hope that each day that I serve Albertans in this Legislature, I make them proud.

My parents, Ronnie and Dianne, are here today as well, so, Mr. Speaker, when I misbehave in the Legislature – and I want to make this clear on the record; it's for my dad and not my mother – you can feel free to call them.

I would ask each individual to rise as I say their name: Debra Lozinski; Marlon Biollo; Greg Paranich; Jon and Kathleen Skjersven and their children Jewel, Jeremiah, Naomi, and Gabriela; Jodi Weening and her children Aliya and Tanis; Amy and Ben Dyck; Ronnie and Dianne Saskiw; Marshall Taranko; Daryl Toma; Tristen Pesaruk; Neil Gorda; Donna Hanson; Lillian Sparks; Sandy Kummetz; David Inscho; Ken and Carl Christensen. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, please be reminded that on Wednesday I will be enforcing the rule of no preambles to your supplementals. Let's see if we can get through Wednesday with no preambles on supplementals.

In 30 seconds we will resume with private members' statements, and I believe, Edmonton-Gold Bar, you'll be up first.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Canada Basketball Initiative

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, in Calgary this past weekend 1,200 young people ages nine to 17 along with their families were involved in the annual Basketball Alberta youth provincial

championships. Basketball is the second-most popular sport in the world. Canada is a major player on the global stage, and Alberta is a significant contributor. Canada has eight players in the NBA, and next year we will surpass France for having the most players in the world's best league, next to the Americans. Over 200 Canadians play basketball professionally around the globe, including 15 Albertans, both men and women.

There are many Canadians on the top U.S. college teams, including two starters on the number-one ranked team in men's NCAA basketball, Gonzaga, with one who is in the running for national player of the year honours. The top-ranked high school recruit in the U.S.A. is a Canadian.

University and college basketball in Canada are thriving. In Edmonton we boast the largest stand-alone basketball facility in North America, the Saville community sports centre, located at the University of Alberta. This building, Mr. Speaker, was built with the support of the community, all three levels of the government working together, including the great contribution from the city of Edmonton and, of course, with Mr. Bruce Saville being a major contributor.

Mr. Speaker, Basketball Alberta has been in negotiations with Canada Basketball to bring the national sports organization's national team programs to our capital city. This would not be possible without this centre. The benefits to all Albertans would be immeasurable and many. The outreach programs of the 10 national team players and coaches in our community would inspire youth to be active in their lives and strive to reach their personal goals and reach their potential. I hope that our community, private and public, gets involved in this outstanding opportunity. We again would be welcoming the world to the capital region in Alberta.

I want to thank Basketball Alberta, Canada Basketball, the city of Edmonton, and sponsors for the work done on this initiative to date, and I want to encourage all the parents of Alberta to get their children and youth involved in the great game of basketball.

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

2012 Alberta Winter Games

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the outstanding work that three local municipalities have done to co-ordinate the success of the 2012 Alberta Winter Games. In fact, this is a perfect example of the Queen's Commonwealth message. The town of Stony Plain along with Parkland county and Spruce Grove collaborated to host what was recently deemed the most successful winter games ever. Their achievement can be measured by the impact that the games and its organizers had on the three surrounding communities. The organizing committee was able to return more than \$28,000 to KidSport Parkland, \$1,500 to the Parkland Potters Guild, \$100,000 to the TransAlta Tri Leisure Centre, and finally, \$20,000 to the legacy rock to symbolize the games' accomplishments.

This impact would not have been as far reaching if it wasn't for the work of Mr. Brad Schneider and the board of directors, who kick-started the organization for this event and set its success in motion. Mr. Schneider and his board also implemented a revolutionary sustainability and recycling project as a part of the games, and this initiative continues today.

Mr. Speaker, the triumph of the 2012 Alberta games truly makes me proud to represent the constituency of Stony Plain. More than 3,000 volunteers sacrificed their time to make the Winter Games an enjoyable event for all athletes and people in attendance. Every

single one of these volunteers is helping to build Alberta through their selflessness and community involvement, and this is the true legacy of an event such as the games.

To quote from the Queen's Commonwealth message, "individuals and communities finding ways to strive together to create a better future that is beneficial for all." Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me the municipalities that set aside their differences and embrace collaboration can achieve greatness and show opportunity through enterprise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Agricultural Safety Week, and we'll no doubt see some celebrations by the government, but this Premier's promise to address the unjust and unsafe working conditions for paid farm workers, including children, remains another promise unfulfilled. Ironically, Alberta's farm animals will be celebrating their 30th anniversary of legislated health and safety standards, Mr. Speaker: animals with legislated health and safety standards, the strictest farm animal care legislation in North America. For example, it's illegal to carry farm animals in an open pickup truck in Alberta, but farm workers? Not a problem.

Politically motivated exemptions for industrial farming operations for occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, and child labour legislation are appalling to conscientious Albertans, as they should be. This discrimination leaves workers and their families at peril and transfers, according to the most recent Alberta statistics, \$374 million for farm injuries over the past 20 years onto the health care budget instead of costs being borne by the agriculture industry through WCB, as is mandatory for all other industrial operations.

Now there is the much-touted social policy framework from a minister who formerly, as child and family services minister and Health minister, took no action on unregulated child farm workers and safety standards for agricultural operations. His glossy brochure calls for all Albertans to be "Safe, Healthy, Secure and Resilient"; that is, unless you're a paid farm worker. Small wonder that this government and this framework are viewed by most Albertans as all about political spin. Agriculture workers, including children, deserve the same rights as every other worker.

Agricultural Safety Week: only the farm animals have anything to celebrate.

2:50

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the all-party Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship I am delighted to table five copies of the committee's report, dated March 2013, titled Review of the Potential for Expanded Hydroelectric Energy Production in Northern Alberta. Copies of this report are being distributed to members today. This report was an independent undertaking of our committee, and I believe it's the first of its kind under our relatively new legislative policy committee system.

I would like to thank my vice-chair, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and all members of the committee from all sides of the House for their co-operation, professionalism, and

even civilized debate during this entire six-month process. As well, I'd like to thank the members of the LAO for their support in helping the committee with this work. Finally, I'd like to thank the stakeholders and presenters who met with us and shared their opinions.

This is a report that we can all be proud of, and the committee looks forward to receiving a response to our recommendations from the government within the 150-day period as laid out in Standing Order 52.09(1). Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 13

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2013

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2013. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, today is private members' day. Let's be reminded to be brief in our presentations, tablings, and reports.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a proposed bill put together by the group Poverty Talks! It's An Act To End Poverty in the Province of Alberta. One of the items they are pushing is the guaranteed living income, which many people like Senator Hugh Segal have brought up and have made the rounds on. It's an excellent bill that I hope everyone will take a look at.

The second one is a tabling from Mr. Ayuz Mukadam. He's living in northeast Calgary. He's concerned about his inability to get a job after graduation and concerned that there are no opportunities for him in his chosen field for various reasons.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of e-mail submissions that Albertans have made to our prebudget tour, which visited seven cities in the last few weeks. Katrina, Angus, Cori, and Clarissa are some of the Albertans who have provided interesting input. For example, Cori is a mother of two young children and is concerned with the quality of education they receive. Cori feels that children in Alberta should have access to top-quality education and should not be the target of budget cuts. Submissions like this clearly show the priorities of Albertans and how out of touch this PC government actually is with its broken-promises budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from Tracy Kjenner, dated March 6, and she is

pleading with the Premier to listen and keep the air medevac open. I have the requisite copies.

The second tabling is an e-mail dated Friday, March 8, from a fellow named Jacques Plante, who is indicating that he is pleading with the government to keep the medevac services open.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is from a Mr. Gordon Steele. It's an e-mail dated Wednesday, March 6, 2013. Mr. Steele has in his e-mail very complex and comprehensive arguments as to why the flat tax is flawed. I table five copies.

I have five copies of a brochure from CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students, the 70,000 students at the U of A, U of C, and University of Lethbridge. It's long-term thinking on postsecondary education. The students want the promise of low tuition, investments in postsecondary education, and the closing of the noninstructional fee loophole.

I also have five copies of an e-mail from Dillon Hargreaves dated February 28, 2013. Dillon is from the Lethbridge College Students' Association. They're very concerned about the likely loss of the summer temporary employment program.

I also have five copies of an e-mail from Marianne Cole dated March 5, 2013. Marianne is concerned. She's a board member of the Hastings Lake Lutheran Bible Camp and is quite concerned about the loss of the STEP funding as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

If not, hon. members, I am tabling five copies of a March 7, 2013, letter from the Ethics Commissioner to Chandra Flett.

Orders of the Day

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to request unanimous consent of the Assembly to transfer the sponsorship of Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, to my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Statement by the Speaker

Amendments to Bill Titles

The Speaker: Hon. members, merely as an advisory and as you are likely already aware, this spring session commenced as a continuation of the First Session of the 28th Legislature. As a result, all matters present on the Order Paper at the conclusion of the last sitting remain on the Order Paper for the Assembly's continued consideration.

Members will note that in tomorrow's Order Paper there's a small amendment, and it will have been made to the title of Bill 207, which appears in the Notices section of the Order Paper, to reflect the current year, 2013.

Bills introduced in 2012 that contain the year in their title will continue to bear that title because they have already been introduced as such. However, should these bills reach the Committee of the Whole stage, members may wish to bring forward amendments to the bills to reflect the current year in the title so that members of the public will know how to locate these acts in the 2013 volume of the *Statutes of Alberta*.

Thank you.

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Incremental Ethane Extraction Program Credits

Q20. Mr. Hehr:
Which companies have been granted royalty credits by the Department of Energy through the incremental ethane extraction program since its inception to December 31, 2011, and what is the value of the credits?

Disputed Oil and Gas Royalties

Q21. Mr. Hehr:
As of June 1, 2012, what was the value of unpaid oil and gas royalties that were in dispute?

AGLC Data Communications Expense

Q22. Dr. Sherman:
What is the breakdown of operating expenses listed under the heading Data Communications for 2009-2010 as reported in note 12 to the financial statements of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, Solicitor General and Public Security annual report, 2009-2010, page 113?

3:00 Nursing Graduates Employed by AHS

Q23. Dr. Swann:
What is the percentage of new graduates from registered nursing programs in Alberta postsecondary institutions who gained employment with Alberta Health Services in each of the fiscal years 2008-2009 to 2011-2012?

The Speaker: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Seniors' Care Facility Staffing

Q9. Mrs. Towle asked on behalf of Mrs. Forsyth that the following question be accepted.
What is the ratio of front-line staff to patients or residents at long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities, with ratios differentiated between public and private facilities?

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically what we're looking for here is obvious. We all know how important it is to have great care and how important that care is to the people who are in facilities. It's important to understand how the staff role exists in that facility. We all know that these numbers are budgeted, that the government books their budgeting based on the numbers and how they come up with those numbers. We also know that the budgets are passed on to the facilities with an idea in mind of what the ratios would be as to how the time is allotted to the patient. The question becomes: how is that time allotted to the patient, and how is that care reflective of the budget? What we're looking for is how many health care aides to patients are in long-term care, continuing care, and lodges and how many LPNs and RNs to patients are in, again, long-term care, continuing care, and lodges.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We also know that there's a difference between public versus private beds, but what we really want to know is: is it 1 to 1, is it 1 to 40, is it 1 to 20? Is there a different ratio? Is it based on activity-based funding? Is it based on patient-based funding? How are they

allotting the resources in the budget to be reflective of the care that is important to all people in the facility?

The other question is that the ratios do matter on the person receiving care. We know that you can have, you know, 40 relatively high-needs seniors in one facility that might need less staff than 25 high-needs seniors in a different facility that might need more staff.

We also know that there may be high-needs seniors in a long-term care setting that require 24-hour nursing care. Is that being provided by health care aides? Is that being provided by LPNs? How is that funded? Given that the current budget actually reflects an allocation of funds to salaries, to patient care, then it would be important to know how that is going forward to each facility.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on May 28, 2012, asked the Minister of Health regarding staffing ratios for LPNs, health care aides, and RNs in long-term care and continuing care facilities and lodges and, unfortunately, didn't get any answer at all. This isn't the first time this question has come up. It comes up all the time. It was in last year's budget estimates. It was the year before that in the budget estimates. The hon. Minister of Health responded: "Residents receive the appropriate level of care in the appropriate place at the right time." The question to that is: well, what is that ratio? What is the appropriate ratio for the appropriate amount of care, and what is the budget that constitutes that?

In the same question on May 28 the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asked about staffing ratios directly relating to long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities. She said that the Health minister in the past had talked about health care standards, setting the ratio, and had said that those standards are set by the government. At the same time she asked for the Health minister to provide those ratios, and again his response was, "We will continue to . . . [provide] the appropriate level of care to the residents" as per their circumstances. Once again, not a straight answer. It would seem to me that the Minister of Health, who sets out the budget accordingly, should be able to provide very easily what he sees as the staffing ratios for long-term care, continuing care, and lodges and public versus private so that Albertans all across the province can understand how the money is being spent in health care.

Additionally, on May 29 the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek also asked the Health minister once again to clarify where these staff ratios are in legislation and regulations, as he'd so said. The answer to that was that the patient-staff ratios are in "various places in legislation and regulation where one can look."

So she did that. She and I both did that; we spent months doing that. Actually, staff ratios are not in the regulations. They're not in the legislation. They're not anywhere to be found. Clearly, the only way to find them out is to bring them to the House, to actually ask a written question on them, and once again we're learning that the Health minister does not want to answer this question. It seems unfathomable to me that we need to keep asking for this information.

The budget is set and the budget is funded according to patient care. We know that residents receiving care in facilities is done on care needs. We also know that care hours are allotted to them, half-hours or quarter-hours, but those hours are allotted to them either through their home care plan or through assessment within the facility. Then the budget is also done in accordance with that.

So it shouldn't be that hard to figure out. If you're in a continuing care facility that has SL 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or supportive living with dementia, 4D, at any point in time the hon. Minister of Health or the Associate Minister of Seniors should be able to pull up relatively easily the staff ratios there are per patient or per client and also pull up relatively easily the budget allotted to that.

It seems that the only reason there would be to not provide that information is that we're either worried about the ratio to client or that there's some sort of alternative reason for not providing the information. If the information is so clear-cut that it's in the regulations and the legislation, it seems that these written questions shouldn't have to keep coming to the House. They could just answer them. Why would you not want to let Albertans know how the dollars are spent and how the care is allotted?

There really is a mistrust of the government in allotting the resources. We hear every single day about how there's not enough staff on at any one type of facility. We hear every day that at night there's not an RN or there might not be an LPN. We know that medication administration can be done by a multitude of levels of care. I saw at a lodge where medication administration was done by a health care aide. Additionally, I've seen it being done by an LPN. And then, of course, in long-term care facilities the majority of the time it's done by an LPN or an RN. Yet there seems to be no ability to figure out exactly how those hours are allotted back towards the budget and how many true patients or clients the staff members are looking after.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asked the question and the Minister of Health replied to her that these ratios are in various places in legislation or regulations, where one can look. She asked the Minister of Health to table – to table – the regulations and the legislation showing where the ratios are that are so clearly defined, as he said. To this day that has not happened; hence, the reason that she's come forward with a written question. She also asked the Minister of Health to table the licensing act, the accommodation standards, the regulations, anything that would give any indication of what the ratio of care provider to client is.

It just seems to be an inability to answer the question. So either they don't know what they're paying for staffing as they take care of clients and what the care needs of the client are and how that relates back to patient need or they don't want everyone else to know how they're funding patient care and how that funding is being applied in a public facility and in a private facility. It would seem that they could clear up a lot of confusion about what staffing requirements there are.

It would also seem that if we knew what the staff ratios were, we could actually start engaging with our universities, our educational facilities, or even some of our on-site facilities that offer health care aide programming, LPN programming to make sure that we are meeting the needs of a growing population who is going to need continuing care, who is going to need lodges, and who is going to need long-term care. Without that information it makes it very difficult to plan for the future. As we all know, we have a rising boomer population that's going to be coming forward, is going to need care, and if we don't know today what we're looking at for patient need versus staffing, then we're really not going to be able to plan going forward.

3:10

It also will have a huge impact on the budgets going forward if all of a sudden we have an increased need for long-term care, which the demographics recently said we do. We know that long-term care is the most expensive type of care going forward, and we know that dementia and Alzheimer's is happening much, much earlier than we originally expected. If we're not entirely certain where those needs are, then it makes it very, very difficult to associate that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'd recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health to respond to this question. I recognize there is a bit of a parade on today with a lot of these, so I will make my comments brief, but I do want to provide some context around staffing levels in long-term care, seniors' lodges as well as continuing care facilities, one of which my grandmother lives in.

The government does not legislate ratios of front-line staff to residents in continuing care facilities. The nursing homes operation regulations specifies that long-term care operators shall provide a minimum of 1.9 paid hours of combined nursing and personal services per resident per day in a nursing home. While 1.9 hours is a minimum requirement, an average of 3.6 paid hours has been achieved by long-term care facilities in the province. The nursing homes operation regulations apply to all long-term care facilities, whether public or contracted providers. In order to determine the right staffing and services to meet the health needs of residents at continuing care facilities, Alberta Health Services has a tool in place to provide consistent and ongoing assessment. These assessments provide information to health professionals and/or facility operators to ensure that the appropriate health staff and supports are in place for individuals.

Mr. Speaker, all operators are required to comply with continuing care health care standards. These standards ensure that the care provided to individuals can take into account their health needs. Publicly funded care and services provided to home-care clients, whether they're residing in their own homes, in seniors' lodges, or in supportive living, are based on their assessed needs.

Since the hon. Minister of Health is unable to respond to the written question and in light of the rationale he has provided, I'd ask that all hon. members respectfully reject this question.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's too bad that the party on the other side is not going to support this question because it's a serious question and it has serious implications. I'm going to use an example that I have right in my own riding, which is the Rimbey lodge. When we ask what the ratio is, what we're trying to do is hold the government accountable, and this accountability has to do with the quality of life and the safety of our seniors.

Now, for the Rimbey lodge alone when you say 1.9 paid hours and that we may have achieved 3.6, what we don't know is: are we running up those hours in some part of that location versus where we need people, staff members or physical staff people, to work?

I want to bring up a problem that has a direct effect on the lives and the quality of care of these seniors. In the Rimbey lodge, as compared to Carmangay, the hallways are too narrow in one section, so when a situation occurs with a senior, which is very commonplace in these lodges, where somebody needs to go to the hospital, needs 911 emergency-type services, they're not able to have gurneys go down the hallway and turn into the room. So now we have to dispatch the fire department to come out and actually physically carry a patient outside to where a waiting gurney can be. It's a safety issue that requires labour and requires people.

The problem we have is simply this. What we're trying to figure out is: is the care up to standard, and what is that standard? Saying a number of hours per resident does not give us the ability to look at a bar so that we can, say, measure maybe one facility against another facility.

I would say that the minister's excuse is not acceptable in terms of hours. What we need to understand is the ratio of employees. I don't think that's hard. I think it's imperative. When we look at that ratio, then we can kind of go back and start making some significant evaluations on the quality of care. That's the goal here. That's why the question has come forward.

This government has bragged in some respects, but it certainly has promoted its commitment to transparency.

When you look at this, there are not a whole lot of reasons why this number needs to be hidden. This is about transparency and accountability. What we really want to know is this ratio of front-line staffpeople, not the number of hours. Now, this is important because when we talk about front-line staffpeople, I want to talk about the people on the floor who are taking care of these seniors, not about the maintenance guy who's racking up overtime working on a boiler change-out, not about the cooks who are maybe working in the kitchen on some other matter, not even including working on the meals.

I mean, there are some issues here in dealing with what we call front-line workers. This is important because in the Rimbey lodge, which is a significant lodge, it's quite sparse. We have three separate buildings, so one person from the midnight to 7 shift, in my view, is not acceptable. If somebody were to fall – and this does happen at the lodges. Somebody gets up and starts wandering.

One of the issues we have is this measurement on the quality of care of our seniors. We try to establish what level of care they require. Anyone who has a parent, a friend, or any connection to someone in some of these seniors' facilities knows that some people have very good days and that some people do not have some very good days. People with dementia sometimes slide in and slide out. There are those days when they're quite independent and need very little care. Then there are those days or those moments when all of a sudden they require supervision and a higher level of care. If you're understaffed on that front line, you cannot necessarily pick that up or not pick that up that easily.

We've had situations where people have fallen down and not had a chance to get up, and luckily one of the other tenants of the facility was able to track them down and then had to go find help. In my view, that's unacceptable. We've had that happen more than once, and the cause of that is directly related to the ratio of front-line workers to the number of people in the facility providing that care.

I'm not looking for the solution to some of the problems that I just gave you as the example. What I'm saying here is that getting the answer to the very question that we asked will help us dig deeper into this problem and find out: are we doing the right thing? Do we just need to move resources from one location to another? The whole premise of trying to find the solution is based on getting information, and I see no reason why information should be withheld. That's really the key here.

Again, I want to go back, and I want to be critical of this government in the sense that this government has said from the beginning that you want to be transparent. From the beginning you said that you want accountability, and here we're looking at a simple question and asking ourselves: why are you trying to withhold the information? For what purpose? That doesn't make sense. It just doesn't make sense from where I stand here as an MLA. It doesn't make sense, if I were the chairman of the Rimoka Housing Foundation, trying to figure out what my staffing needs should be when the board meets.

Again, this is not about managing Energy or ESRD or Infrastructure. This is about the quality of life of our seniors, the people who deserve better from us, the people who actually built

Alberta. This is about not just their quality of life. It's about safety, and it's about emergency services. It has that direct effect. I would have hoped – I would have hoped – that this government would have put a little bit more emphasis on the effect that it has on our seniors versus just: we don't want to do some accounting to give this information to the opposition party. Our seniors deserve not just our respect, but they deserve some dignity also. What they also deserve is accountability and transparency from this government. That's not a lot to ask for from a government that says that they want to do it. Again, now we have a disconnect between what our government has been portraying as its values and what's not happening.

Again, just in support of why I think this member deserves to get this answer, I want to finish by saying that our seniors deserve it and that they deserve better from this government. Thank you very much.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to close debate?

Mrs. Towle: No.

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

Okay. Either way either member will close debate because one was acting on behalf of the other hon. member. So either one of you will close debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this. As the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre just explained, this is yet another example of this government's failure to actually be honest with Albertans. They wonder why people can't trust them.

We have a very simple question in front of us here, Mr. Speaker. It's asking for a ratio. I mean, this is fundamental to our ability to be able to challenge what you're doing and to be able to challenge and find efficiencies in the delivery of health care, to be able to understand what's happening. What we hear on the front lines is critically important, and what we're hearing is that quite often those ratios are not very good, quite frankly. I heard today that we have one LPN who is looking over 81 beds overnight in one facility with one helper. Imagine that. It's insanity. Why can't we just simply get some numbers? Long-term care facilities: we understand how those are defined. Is it that hard to really take a look at what the number of patients is versus the number of staff at any given time, average it out, find all of the long-term care facilities in the province, get that number, deliver that number?

The whole purpose of Written Questions is to have the government provide a more detailed response to a question than what they could be expected to during question period, yet here we go again, another rejection. The government doesn't like the question. It's not going to make them look very good, so they just flat out reject it. Seniors' lodges, continuing care facilities – and it's also very fundamental for us to be able to understand how to challenge you to understand what the different ratios are in public versus private care. We accept that there are two models of care out there that you are funding, and rightfully so, but what if the public is providing better care than the private facilities or vice versa?

That is information that we as the opposition and Albertans in general should have a right to know. If you want to be accountable to Albertans, if you want to have an open and transparent government, this is just simply information that will help everyone understand where the money is being spent. Is it being spent wisely? Are there efficiencies in different systems? Can we do a

better job? Apparently, the answer is that you guys are perfect, that you've got it under control, and we should just trust you. You know what? Quite frankly, we don't.

So here we are. You're giving us further reason to turn around and tell Albertans that you can't be trusted. You don't even have the opportunity, when given, to put out a forthright answer and provide it to us when asked. Here we go again; déjà vu all over. I'm sure that this won't be the last time that we stand and that I speak along these very same lines, but, you know, again, I just want to congratulate the government for being more open, honest, and transparent; promises made, promises broken.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the pleasure of talking to my friend the Associate Minister of Seniors about this issue as there have been some concerns brought to my attention with facilities in my area. On some facilities I hear zero complaints; they're wonderful. There have been other facilities that have received many complaints, and many of those complaints are due to the staffing. The staff that are there do an excellent job, but there aren't enough of them.

When it's lunchtime, they have to go and help serve lunch to the residents that come to the cafeteria, the eating area. They spend a lot of time helping them. There are residents that cannot get to the eating area, that have to stay in their room. By the time they're finished giving the meals out and cleaning up after the residents in the cafeteria, by the time they get the meals delivered to the residents in their rooms, it's 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The food is cold; the food is old. You know, they're not very happy.

Many times I've heard that residents are left in their beds after they've had an accident because the staff is too busy with the other patients, and by the time they get to come and check on that patient, you know, he's been lying in his bed for quite some time.

I really think there need to be ratios, how many staff members per patient, so that the seniors in our facilities get the excellent care they deserve. You know, as many of our members have stated, the seniors are the ones that built this province. They're the ones that we need to look after. They have to be cared for in the manner that they deserve, and quite frankly I think there are some facilities that are lacking in the number of staff per patient that allows the staff to do the best job that they can to ensure that these patients and these seniors are looked after.

I think it would be very well received if the government could come and say: "Okay. Well, you know, we have this many patients. We have to have this many staff." We really feel that the staff in that ratio must be actual nurses, nurses' aides, and those health professionals that are looking after the patients. As the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre stated, we hope it isn't the janitors and the cooks that are then included in these staff hours per patient.

You know, the Associate Minister of Seniors – we've discussed this – assured me that he is going to be looking into some of my concerns. Hopefully, the government will take them into account as we continue these discussions for the next three years, that they will actually act and ensure that the seniors are getting the proper care that they deserve.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How much time do we have for each of these?

The Deputy Speaker: Ten minutes.

Mr. Anderson: Ten minutes.

I'd like to stand and, obviously, support this written question. I'm very puzzled as to why the government wouldn't be jumping at the opportunity to answer it. It seems like a very basic question of accountability in our health care system.

Just to again remind people what it is, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has asked the question as follows: "What is the ratio of front-line staff to patients or residents at long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities, with ratios differentiated between public and private facilities?" Now, I don't understand why such a basic question of accountability can't be answered by this government. You know, if they don't have this information, if the Associate Minister of Seniors is lacking this information, I guess the question would be: how are they able to do their jobs effectively?

I'm always amazed when we get into these written questions and we start talking about things. I'm always dazed and confused at the fact that the government does not have this information. Maybe that would explain some of the erratic and poor decisions that are being made by that side of the House, because they don't have these pieces of important, critical information at their fingertips. We give them a lot of time in advance. We give these questions months in advance to be looked at. You would think that with the armies of staff and researchers that they have in their departments and in the government, they could find this information and make it public. It's hard enough, Mr. Speaker, to do our jobs effectively without having proper, relevant information in our hands to make good decisions.

With regard to this issue in particular, it's very puzzling that the government wouldn't know everything about this area because this is one of the most critical areas of crisis, I would say, in our health care system today. We all know in this House that we do not have enough long-term care. We do not have enough long-term care. We specifically don't have enough public long-term care. Because of that backup in the system, those seniors, when they should be in long-term care, are instead in much more expensive and much less comfortable accommodations in acute care. Because of that, not only are they not getting the care that they need to be comfortable in their golden years, when they need assistance, but it's also costing the health care system more. It's costing us more money.

3:30

So we build these Taj Mahal acute-care facilities like the one that just opened up in the south, a beautiful facility. No expense was spared. That's why it came in three times over budget. We put this huge facility out there. Do we need all the beds in there? Well, we do if we don't have proper long-term care. If we can't free up some of the acute-care beds we have at other hospitals with proper long-term care, yeah, I guess we'll keep needing to build these expensive, massive hospitals that cost a fortune to staff and maintain.

That's called poor planning. That's why we are sitting here, Mr. Speaker, with a massive, close to \$6 billion cash deficit. That's why we're borrowing \$4 billion this year. That's why we're draining our sustainability fund by \$2 billion this year. We keep making dumb decisions on things like this. We keep on putting seniors in acute-care locations when really they should be in proper long-term care, which is cheaper. They want to be in those kinds of situations. They don't want to be in hospitals if it can be helped. They want to go there temporarily, and they want to leave, like any other human being, yet they live there for years in some

cases. One need only talk to residents in Fort McMurray, where there are seniors that have lived in that facility for years and years and years, waiting for a bed, because they want to stay close to their families in Fort McMurray. That's just one example. There are many others.

It's a very serious problem, so I guess the question is: if we want to fix the health care system so that it's more cost effective and it cares for people more and in a better way, then why on earth are we not able to answer simple questions like staffing ratios at long-term care facilities, both public and private? We could make better decisions. We could understand the problem better as a society, as a province. Certainly, as opposition members I'm always amazed. The government says, "Oh, if the opposition had done their homework" and this, that, and the other thing. Then we ask questions so we can do our homework, and they won't give us the answers to the questions.

You know, it's just like the infrastructure priorities. Show us the list. We asked for the list. They say, "Which projects would you cut?" We say, "Show us your list, and we'll talk about it." We FOIP it, and they won't give it to us because they say that it's confidential, as was mentioned earlier today. I mean, it's nonsensical, the hypocrisy of sitting there and saying that we shouldn't be asking these questions, that we should do our homework, and then not giving us the simple information that would allow us to have the information at our fingertips so we don't have to ask them these questions, so we could do our homework. It's very hypocritical. It's truly wrong, is not how to run a government, and certainly is not transparent.

Mr. Speaker, we're just talking about this one, but as I look down the list, these are all very reasonable requests for information. There's nothing here that's a risk to the confidentiality of the Treasury Board. There's nothing here that's a security risk or something like that. There's nothing improper being asked for here. It's just some basic information. If the government doesn't have that information, then one would have to believe that the government is entirely incompetent as it relates to that, as it relates to the issue of long-term care. Any competent government would have that information and would be able to provide that information at a moment's notice, let alone after months and months and months of asking for it.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that this government should go back after we all vote in the affirmative that this question be answered. I know that the government members are going to support it because it's the right thing to do. After this is passed unanimously by this House, the associate minister should go back and find this information and provide it to the House so that they can make proper and rational decisions with it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the vote, and I hope that we can move forward on the issue of long-term care because it's a serious issue in our communities, and it's an issue that affects Albertans day to day in very personal ways. I think we've all had loved ones in long-term care, or I would assume we've all had loved ones in long-term care at some point in our lives. If not, I'm sure we will soon.

Mr. Dorward: Don't look at me when you say that.

Mr. Anderson: Sorry?

Mr. Dorward: I'll be in there soon enough.

Mr. Anderson: That's right. The hon. member points out something very good.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, please, hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar points out a very key issue here. I'm actually asking this for him. I'm asking that we improve the long-term care system for that hon. member because, as he stated, he'll be in there soon enough, you know? And he doesn't want to be sleeping in a hospital. I mean, that's lame.

Mr. Dorward: I don't want any accidents.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

Mrs. Forsyth: You've been so quiet, and then all of a sudden you just woke up again.

Mr. Anderson: No, but he had a very relevant point. He had a very relevant point, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair. Through the chair, please.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, he had a very, very, very rational point, and I think that that needs to be recognized for its rationality and its uniqueness, its unique rationality. [interjection]

You see, I'm very distracted, Mr. Speaker, by all of the heckling from my side of the House. Anyway, I hope we can take care of this moving forward and get an answer to this question.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this written question. You know, from the onset and in rereading this, as other members have, first of all, it seems like a very simple, straightforward request. But for myself, upon listening to some of the responses on the other side, yet another example of something that I don't understand and can't explain is how this ratio that's being requested is not at the fingertips of my colleagues on the other side of the House. I'm going to extrapolate on the implications that that brings.

First and foremost, in order to get a sense of how well our system is working or, perhaps, how well our system isn't working or is underperforming, it needs to come from measures and performances. Just like students in school need different measures to see how they're doing, how well they're learning the material, et cetera, in order for the government to make decisions based on spending and on funding and on the quality of care, for example, that we're providing to seniors, as in this question, that's a very difficult question to answer if we don't even know what is the ratio of staff to patients.

You know, I think it's frustrating that this information is so difficult to get a hold of. In this written question, I mean, it's a breakdown that was written very well, talking about the ratio of front-line staff to patients who are residents and then going through the different types of seniors' lodges from long-term care facilities to continuing care. Especially important for me and my caucus is looking at that differential between public and private facilities. Again, let's get to the bottom of this as far as: are facilities providing different qualities of care, different levels of care? That can be seen most easily, first and foremost, through ratios of staff to patients.

You know, a colleague of mine from the Wildrose stood up and gave an example of how there was one staff overnight at a hospital with somewhere around 80 residents that they had to supervise. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I wouldn't want my parents to be in that type of facility, where there's such little care

because of the number of staff. Again, I'll make it very clear that it's not because the residents and the folks and the LPNs and RNs that work in these facilities don't care. They care more than ever, which is why they're still there when they have wages that are sometimes unacceptable, why they work very long hours.

The bottom line comes to the point that if we value our seniors, the people who built this province, if we want to treat them with dignity and respect, which I've heard from the lips of many of the members on the other side of the House time and again, well, then what are they doing to ensure that there are measurements in place so that we know what quality of care our seniors are getting?

3:40

It all comes down to accountability. In order to be accountable, we need to have these numbers, so it seems absolutely ridiculous that there's a reluctance to either produce these numbers or to share these numbers with not just all members of this House but all Albertans. You know, ever since the ministry of transparency was created – I think that is the sweetest piece of irony in this government's portfolio of ministries because, if anything, that ministry is more the Ministry of Building Walls and Hiding Things. If we're asking for this information, well, then it should be forthcoming. If this government claims to be the most transparent, accountable government that has been in power in years, then show it. Prove it. Quit speaking with lip service, and let's see the numbers. Let's show Albertans that we are offering a high quality of care for our seniors, that we are hiring enough staff.

I mean, earlier we talked a little bit about the budget and its implications. Again, I find it quite fascinating that the current government loves to build new, shiny things and put up buildings, yet when it comes time to staff them or to operate them, well, that's when the dollars fall short, and it's somehow less important, as seen by the number of facilities that have been half constructed or are incomplete around the province or completed yet underused or understaffed.

So I'm speaking in favour of this, and I'm sure I agree with all my colleagues on this side of the House, but I truly hope that on the government side they look at these requests as being reasonable requests. Again I'll remind my colleagues that during the election they campaigned very strongly on working with members from all sides of the House, on being open minded and willing to entertain amendments that truly speak to improving a bill or improving the lives of Albertans, for them to let party lines drop aside and put Albertans and the people of this province as our first priority. So when we have pieces of either legislation or recommendations or written questions that are being asked, if it speaks to the betterment of our society and works toward that, then accept it and vote for it.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I find it shameful when members cannot vote regarding a bill or legislation or a written question if they honestly agree with it but feel: I can't because my party is inhibiting me from doing so. So I ask members across the way to look at these reasonable requests and show Alberta that lip service isn't the only thing you have to offer them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. Firstly, I was going to raise a point of order earlier on, but maybe I'll just mention it for future reference. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake failed to actually move acceptance of the question, so

I'm not sure we actually have a valid question on the floor. Maybe we can just deem it moved and then make sure we do that as we go forward.

The hon. members opposite failed, I think, to listen to the hon. Solicitor General when he responded to this question. It's not a question of not providing information; it's a question of doing your homework and understanding exactly what information is useful. Flat ratios are not a useful measure. As hon. members will know, the ones that have delved into this will know, the level of care changes with respect to the individual and their care needs, and the number of hours of nursing service or attendant service that is to be provided is legislated based on the care needs of the patient, not a standard ratio for a facility.

It's care of the patient that matters, care of the individual that matters, not the institutional model, so a ratio for an institution is quite irrelevant. What's relevant is the mix of patients in the particular facility and the care needs of each of those individuals. The question does not ask for relevant information insofar as one wouldn't look at a particular building and say that there's a ratio that's required for the building. One would look at the patients that are in the building, the care levels of each of those patients, and then the number of hours of care that's provided for each of those patients. It's a more complex thing, I know, but a much more relevant way to look at it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader. I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, notwithstanding the minister's comments, without adequate measures for long-term care it's extremely difficult to know what standard one should be holding staffing accountable to, what standard this government is going to accept in terms of both quantity of hours per person and quality of care. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: The lack of ability now to monitor what's happening in these nursing homes and to clearly articulate a standard for various levels of acuity or severity or need is the big problem here. This is a beginning step. This written question is a beginning step to at least allow us some information about why we get all these complaints in our offices from family members and seniors themselves about not only inconsistent care but inferior care in so many seniors' care residences. The move towards private operations is only aggravating the perception that we don't have sufficient standards and that we don't have sufficient monitoring of those standards, and then we don't have enforcement of those standards.

This is a government that likes to waffle around terminology and not set in place clear standards, a consistent pattern of monitoring them, a public report on how those standards were or were not met, and then on enforcement of these standards. I'm afraid that it flies in the face of this minister's comments that, well, it depends on the severity. Well, of course it depends on the severity. Why don't we have standards that show what level of staffing ratio is for the most serious level and what level of care goes down from there? Are we meeting the standards, Mr. Minister? No, we're not according to many people across this province.

I heard from one yesterday in a coffee shop who made a special attempt to meet with me before this session, knowing that we were going to be discussing this issue. Her mother was in a ward of 54 long-term care patients where there were only four staff that night.

I asked: why were there only four to deal with 54 people? Because two people were sick, and nobody else would come in. Well, this is the kind of story that she says happens on a frequent basis, where either there is sickness or there is cost-cutting or there is an unwillingness to hold themselves accountable for both the quantity of staffing and the quality of care that results. The quantity is integrally related to quality of care.

What I see is a government that's been unwilling to actually put in place standards, a consistent monitoring of those standards, a public reporting on those standards so that people can actually have confidence that we are doing what we say we're doing in government, and finally, enforcement of standards. What's the penalty if people are not meeting the standard, if they're sloughing off one or two staff a night to save money or because they can't find anybody to go in that night? I think that's what we're concerned about. I know all of you across the floor are concerned about the quality of care of seniors, so why will you not take more seriously your responsibility to monitor and enforce basic standards?

You're moving to activity-based funding now. How are we going to be measuring, and are staffpeople going to be registering seniors as lower than they actually are just in order to get away with lower staffing ratios? How are we going to monitor this activity-based funding so that it's legitimate and we can have confidence that people in these institutions are not being shortchanged? The whole fight about the one or two baths a week is symptomatic, to me, of a system that simply is not working and does not have the confidence of people to say: "You know what you're doing. You have standards in place. We know you're monitoring, and you're monitoring without informing them that you're monitoring."

I hear many stories that at seniors' centres they know when the inspectors are coming, so they put on the dog. They make everything look great. They have the staffing beefed up, and everything looks good. That's not acceptable for a government that says that it wants serious objective indicators of quality of care.

3:50

All we're asking for is a set of standards, a real serious commitment to irregular monitoring – let's make it irregular so that there's no consistency in the monitoring that can be predicted and can be acted out in the workplace – and then some consequences when companies or public facilities fail to meet those standards. I want that for my mother. You want that for your mother. Why will you not put in place a serious commitment that can gain the trust and respect of everyone in Alberta?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'll recognize the Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It just goes back to the question-and-answer part. It's a legitimate question. I get that some members feel that there's an unobtainable answer for it, but you've got to sit there and ask: why are we comparing things? I mean, the key part of the question here is: what would work better, the public versus the private? What's the differential on it? What's working? I think we're all looking for the answers in this province, something that will work. [interjection] Well, it says that right in it. I'm just reading the question.

The question is: why can we not come up with the answers? It's straightforward. It's not a catty question that we're asking, which can happen sometimes in this Chamber. [interjection] Yeah. The

odd time we can maybe be a little out of bounds on the questions. But I think this is pretty straightforward. It's hard for some people to grasp, I guess, when you're just asking a straightforward question, why we can't have the answers.

What can we do better? Health care is obviously a huge issue in this province. We've got a question here that could lay it out. Now, I know someplace in the back somebody has the answer for this because there had to be a standard set somewhere for it. It wasn't just: we've decided what the numbers are for long-term care and everything else so what the ratio is for the front-line workers. There has to be a base somewhere in there. I can't understand why we wouldn't want to share that. At some point we could probably try to work together to get the proper answers: what will work in this province?

I'll leave my debate short on that. I don't understand why it's so hard to answer a fairly simple question instead of just saying: we need to remove the question; we don't want to be part of it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies to the Member for Little-Bow for jumping up in front of him. I would never get in front of him on any point. He's a guy I have great respect for, and I'm glad he got to speak first. [interjection] Where is that member from that continually blurts out?

An Hon. Member: Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. McAllister: The Member for Calgary-Lougheed may be the best heckler, but he always describes it like this. I just wish you'd stand up and talk when it's your turn, Calgary-Lougheed.

I want to speak to the issue, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Please do, hon. member.

Mr. McAllister: . . . and to the question from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, but I think we should go back for those at home that are watching so they know exactly what it is we're speaking about.

Again, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asked the following question: "What is the ratio of front-line staff to patients or residents at long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities, with ratios differentiated between public and private facilities?" Just to revisit it so we know where we're going, it does seem like a pretty relevant question to find out how things are going in seniors' care in this province, but for those that aren't familiar, government has chosen to not accept the question. They reject the question, which means they don't have to answer, effectively, to us, who are trying to ask it on behalf of you at home to better represent seniors in this province.

The Member for Airdrie made a point. He thought the reason, Mr. Speaker, that the government wouldn't answer this question is because they were incompetent. I tend to disagree with the Member for Airdrie on that point, for what it's worth. I don't believe that to be the case. I think that the reason governments choose which questions they want to answer or not is because they recognize how the answer will make them look to the public. That is why, for instance, the budget was broken into three sets of numbers also. It's a way of disguising to the public what's really happening, clearly to try and take their focus from the bottom line.

The answer to this question: somebody has it. I don't believe for one second that the government is incompetent on everything. I think they've been there 40-plus years for a reason, but I think that

somewhere in that 40 years they forgot that the reason they are in those chairs is to answer the question when asked. The reason that we sit here is because seniors and our loved ones voted us in. When we ask for a ratio, it's so we can find out what the quality of care is, so we can find out that they're being taken care of. That's a legitimate question, but again, Mr. Speaker, it was rejected.

Now, the hon. House leader across, the Minister of Human of Services, I believe, spoke to – how did he put it? – the ratios being inconsequential because of different levels amongst the seniors and the care provided them. Don't we ask for the same thing in education? Don't we ask for class sizes and teacher ratios? What is the difference? I don't think the Minister of Education would rise and suggest that's inconsequential for one second. I would suggest we recognize there are varying levels of students in classrooms. Don't we? The same with seniors. There are varying levels of care needed, depending on the senior.

We have students in class that are learning English as a second language. We have students needing supports. We have students that are above the bar and below the bar, whatever that bar is, and we ask teachers to provide the best care that they can, the same as with health care providers. So when we ask what the ratio is of those looking after our seniors to the number of seniors, we're asking a pretty darn relevant question so that we can find out what the care is that is provided for our loved ones, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think for one second that the government is incompetent. I think they have gotten to a point where they don't recognize anymore that they were put here by Albertans to answer these very questions, and nearly 500,000 Albertans put us in the Wildrose Party here as the Official Opposition to ask the questions that they forget to answer. This is a good one and a good example.

There's nobody in here, of 87 members, that doesn't have a parent, a grandparent, somebody aging that probably will be in a facility at some time, you know. I should say, although we all have said it, that we believe the quality of care provided in Alberta to be as good or better than anywhere in the country, probably the world, that the compassion of Albertans is amazing, so we tip our cap to the caregivers. We'd just suggest that, you know, government ought to come clean about the numbers so that we can know that our seniors, those close to us, are being cared for.

In asking this question, I also try and ask myself why it is that they wouldn't answer it. Why is it that they don't want us to know it? I think I touched on it, but maybe it needs some fleshing out a little bit. If there's something there, Mr. Speaker, that the government would be embarrassed by, it often will avoid providing the facts that we need to see. I just think they ought to be more transparent, and they ought to be more forthcoming with Albertans and those that have put us here to ask these questions. There are members opposite, you know, that have seniors' facilities in their ridings, as I said, that have loved ones that would like this question answered. They have to look their constituents in the eye. I think it's become the era of government, where government assumes it will only do what it feels is right, not what the public feels is right, that it will only answer what it wants to, not what Albertans really want to hear about.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here proudly on behalf of the 10,000-plus that put me here, just like my colleagues and the half a million people in this province, because we deserve answers to questions like these. Albertans deserve answers to questions like these. You can continue to reject them, and we will continue to ask them.

Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's kind of baffling, I think, to all of us on this side of House at least why these kinds of simple questions can't be given simple, straight-forward, plain-English answers. It's a little bit troubling. Those of us that come from a management or a business background recognize that if you don't measure something, you can't manage it as well. You can't manage it very well at all. What we're really asking for is some clarity on a ratio that's relevant and will speak to the issue of consistency between facilities, whether they're private or publicly funded. I think it's important that the people of Alberta have that feedback. We're simply asking for some numbers that ought to be readily available. If they aren't, I think that's a serious concern. If they aren't and that's why we aren't getting them, then that would be an embarrassment to me if I were charged with the responsibility for providing a consistent level of care across the province to those that are among our most vulnerable, as we've said.

My own parents, 92 and 93 years old, are in a long-term care facility. I appreciate the care that they receive, but I, too, would like to know how that's determined and how it's measured because even though they are getting good care, sometimes there are some inconsistencies that I wonder about. I'm sure to someone like our Health minister and those that are responsible for this that's a small piece of a great big picture, but nevertheless it's a piece that I'm personally interested in. I think that, as has been mentioned numerous times today, it's not just the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that's going to be there soon. All of us one day or another may be in that position if we eat lots of bran and look both ways when we cross the street.

Anyway, why is it such a secret? What's so special about this little bit of knowledge that it has to be kept close to your chest like a full house in a card game? I don't get it. I think that if it's fear, if you're going to be embarrassed by the answer, well, you're adults. Take your lumps. Give us the information. What's the point of forcing something like this to happen, where we have to point out how paranoid-appearing this kind of reluctance is to the people of our province?

Again, to repeat: if you don't measure it, your ability to manage is reduced. Are you guessing? Are you going by gut feel? If there aren't any standards, then that speaks to a breakdown in the system. Systems are perfectly aligned to produce the results they get, and right now we're seeing some inconsistencies that are a cause for concern. We're hearing about this from our constituents, the members of our ridings, and probably from your ridings, too, if you were allowed to speak up and speak out on behalf of them.

Anyway, I think that it's shameful and disgraceful that this simple request continues to be rebuffed. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Ah, my gentle ones, this is a learning day. This is a learning opportunity for you. Yeah, I know. This is what the government does. They keep information in such a way that you can't get the answers that you're looking for. This is a very familiar scenario to me.

I am really heartened to see how many people are concerned about the seniors that are in their constituency. I'm sure that's true for some of the people over there, and I urge them to join the conversation.

I would argue here that there is a difference. What the government has done and how they would answer you, if they answered you, is to say that they do keep track. They keep track of the number of hours that any given patient gets attention, gets one-on-one care, but they don't necessarily keep track of or won't

admit to keeping track of and won't give you the information about what the ratio is. They say: "Well, it doesn't matter. It's how many hours of attention the person gets. That's what we need to know."

This was actually changed and improved, let me say, four years ago, five years ago. I'm sorry; I can't remember her name. It's got a lake in it or a river.

An Hon. Member: Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Blakeman: There we go. Calgary-Fish Creek.

She'd remember. The number of hours of care that anyone was getting in long-term care went up from like one point something to 3.2, I think, and this was a big leap forward.

Let me talk a little bit about the ratio and why it matters. I think the ratio matters when you're looking for basic health and safety if you have one RN on for a facility that has three floors and 60 rooms on each floor and, as happens every single year without fail at this time of year, you start getting norovirus or some sort of flu going through there and you start getting a couple of people upchucking in the middle of the night and they're not people who can particularly get themselves into a position to do that, shall I say, appropriately – I'm sorry I'm so graphic here – where you can lean over the bed and actually puke into the wastebasket or whatever. You don't get that very often in long-term care. Literally, people can't turn themselves over. This is where that ratio becomes important.

The next thing the government is going to say is: oh, it's Chicken Little, and the sky is falling; you're always talking about worst-case scenarios. Well, no, not particularly. The flu happens every year. People start throwing up in the middle of the night every year, and you've got one person that is an RN on duty for an entire facility, and then on each floor of that facility you're going to have probably an LPN that's on. They are now going to try and start to deal with all of this.

God forbid that you have someone in that facility that needs an ambulance because almost none of these facilities will have the permission of the patient or the resources to be able to deal with anything more difficult than providing oxygen. The machine that – help me with this: the shocker machine that they all have on the little stand on the wall now.

An Hon. Member: A defibrillator.

Ms Blakeman: A defibrillator. Thank you very much.

If you do have someone that needs an ambulance and is going to have to leave the facility, then you have your staff tied up with getting the ambulance people in, getting them into the right room, and making sure the patient gets taken out. This is when it becomes critical.

The government is sort of playing a game of risk and time here. They say: well, you know, that doesn't happen very often, so we can risk not having a higher staff ratio on because we don't think it's going to happen. The thing is that when it does happen, everybody turns to the government and goes: "Why didn't you protect those seniors? You alone had the ability to make sure these people were looked after and you didn't." A fire, a flood, snow causing a roof cave-in: it's not hard to think of those occasions where you would need to have skilled staff on hand. That's not to say that the personal assistants and the nursing aides aren't wonderful people – I see them twice a week; I know they are – but they don't have the skills, and they don't want to be put in that position either.

I know it's frustrating to the Official Opposition to be flogging what we wish was a dead horse, but there we go. The government

is not going to give us this information because it's not going to make them look very good. Those ratios are bad. Let's face it, folks. If this was a good-news story, they'd be fighting each other to get to their feet and tell us what the ratio is, but they're not. They are not meeting my eyes. They are looking anywhere but at my eyes right now. Yup, there we go. [interjections] I'm sorry. We've got two of them over there that are being particularly difficult, so we will give credit to Edmonton-Gold Bar and Calgary-Glenmore. Thank you for the eyeball.

That's how these kinds of questions get answered, and that's why it's so frustrating to people in this House when we get the government kind of playing jiggery-pokery with the numbers and/or a shell game.

Mr. Anderson: They wouldn't do that.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, they would. I'm so sorry, Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I know that you are . . .

Mr. Anderson: Just Airdrie.

4:10

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay. Don't change your names anymore.

That's why it's frustrating, and that's why it's so frustrating to all of us to hear the government put itself out as being transparent. As we try and dig out things that we think are not going well, we've got to have proof, and as we try and dig that proof out, the government won't answer the questions that we're actually asking because it's going to make them look bad. I'm sorry to stand up today and give you a little bit of historical perspective and the bad news that they are never going to answer this question. But it doesn't mean that you should stop trying.

I have spent a lot of time in long-term care facilities over the last going on 12 years, and I've got to say that even the hours of care are just kind of pitiful. I mean, the idea that someone would go into a long-term care facility in Alberta and not be in diapers within six months – it does happen here because the staff don't have time to deal with taking someone to the bathroom and then waiting for them and supervising them and then getting them back into their bed or into their chair. They don't have time. That could be 20 minutes or 45 minutes. We all know the biggest discussion when you're in the hospital is bowel movements. Well, that's why. I'm sorry; it's very graphic today. I apologize for that.

That's what happens. They don't have time to do that. People wait. They press that call bell. I've never been in the facility my mom is in without the call bells going off, at least one call bell, the entire time I'm there. People are waiting for someone to come and help them. They're not going to get that help. There's a euphemism they use. It's not: there's been an accident. It's: incontinence, several episodes. That's what it is. Then they say: "Well, you know, we can't do it anymore. They're going to have to be put in diapers."

There they are, you know, perfect people who were the top of our society. The leaders in our society – respected and important and even powerful – are wearing diapers. They didn't want to. They want to be able to go to the bathroom, but they can't because there are not enough staff. Pretty undignified, huh? Probably not a bank manager – they're probably in private care, and they actually do have someone that will wait long enough for them to go to the bathroom – but certainly a nurse or radiologist or teacher. All those people are sitting in long-term care in diapers. And it matters. It makes a difference to them that they're in diapers. It affects their ability to keep going and take themselves seriously

and strive to eat their meals and all those good kinds of things because they're sitting there in diapers.

Gee, this got really depressing, didn't it?

Mrs. Towle: No. It's true.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It's all true, but it's still depressing.

Anyway, my friends, that's why you're not going to get an answer. And I'm sorry to give that information to you and to those backbenchers that are just discovering for the first time that that's why people end up in diapers, your parents, yes indeed, my mother in diapers. Uh-huh. Yeah. So keep up the work. We'll keep pressing to get answers to things. But in the meantime I kind of think we got the answer because they won't answer.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise here today to speak to this question. Of course, the question, as stated by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, is to ask the government the following question: "What is the ratio of front-line staff to patients or residents at long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities, with ratios differentiated between public and private facilities?"

I guess, you know, we see again and again in the news that Albertans can't trust this government. Obviously, a lot of that has to do with an ongoing series of broken promises, but I think that equally as well it's the fact that they just won't be open and transparent and answer some very, very simple questions like this. To me this is just basic, empirical evidence that one would want to obtain to be able to make proper decisions. One has to ask the question: what do you have to hide in such a straightforward question?

We have a Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation. I'm not sure what exactly he does if he doesn't deal with things just like this: to be more open and transparent, to provide information so that Albertans can see what's going on, so that decision-makers can use that data to come up with proper decision-making capacity. If there was ever a role for the Associate Minister of AT and T to step into, it's right here. He's got the opportunity to step in here, to show some true leadership on this issue, to show that the PC government is doing things differently, that they're actually being open and transparent, not just talking about it, yet apparently he's unwilling or unable to step forward for whatever reason and come out here.

We, of course, know that this is a very big issue, where seniors are stuck in acute-care beds when they should actually be in long-term care facilities or other types of facilities. We know that in his own riding the Associate Minister of AT and T has a situation where seniors are stuck in acute-care beds for years and years and years. This information should be very important to him, and the fact that he's unwilling to stand up for his constituents, to find out what this information is – we'd like to see some action on this. Of course, there are numerous, numerous seniors that are stuck in hospital beds and in some cases very deplorable conditions.

I've had the opportunity to meet some seniors in my local area that have been waiting and waiting for another type of care. Of course, for the longest time they were fed this prepackaged food that tasted disgusting, and they're stuck in these hospital beds with disgusting food when they should be getting another type of care. This prepackaged food that reeks, sent from some other province: our seniors are stuck eating this kind of garbage while they're

stuck in acute-care beds, still not getting the proper care that they should get. On top of that, it's even more expensive for these seniors to be stuck in acute-care beds than in long-term care or being provided the type of home care that they could utilize if they have the capacity to stay in their own home.

You know, the Government House Leader mentioned that this type of information is inconsequential, and I couldn't disagree more with him. How many staff are there compared to the patients that are at a particular facility? Well, I can tell you that if you actually go and meet the seniors in those acute-care beds or continuing-care facilities or long-term care beds, those are very, very important ratios, the number of staff that are taking care of those individuals. To just merely dismiss it as inconsequential I think is a disservice to those people in the industry. Maybe it's his opinion that they're inconsequential, but to . . .

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, noted that the Government House Leader rose on a point of order at 4:17.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And the citation, Government House Leader?

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Hancock: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). The member totally misrepresented the representations that I made earlier in debate, and I think it's necessary to clarify that. I didn't say that the number of staff was inconsequential or that it was unimportant. What I said was that measuring a ratio based on an institutional model as opposed to measuring the hours that are available to care for a patient based on a care model are two entirely separate things. The public and the care sector and everybody else has moved away from an institutional model of care and moved towards caring for patients on patient need and a patient care plan basis.

That's what I said, and if the hon. member wants to make his own representations about what's important, wants to go back to the past on institutional models, that's for him to do, but don't put that in my mouth. What I said was not anything to do with not respecting the care for patients but, rather, with how much respect we have for patients by allocating care on the basis of the need of the care plan of the patient, not on the institution that they're in.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

4:20

Mr. Anderson: Well, I'm very, very thankful for that clarification. Clarification is always good. There's obviously no point of order here, Mr. Speaker. We've been in question period and have seen these disputes resolved by the Speaker many, many, many, many times. I think it's very clear that you can have two interpretations of what was said. In this case, I think, from what I was hearing, he was saying that what was being asked for, the ratios – it was completely inconsequential to have that information. That's certainly what I gleaned from it, so I'm glad for his interpretation. I think that, you know, we can interpret from his comments what they seemed to say. That's part of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member for Airdrie, a clarification.

Hon. Government House Leader, can we agree that this is a clarification and move on?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, you can do whatever you want.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We will do that. The matter is clarified.

Please proceed, Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just thrilled that that whole issue is clarified, just really helpful here when we debate this question.

Debate Continued

Mr. Saskiw: Just going back to the question here, very simple information that we're trying to seek from the government, it's a ratio, a ratio between the staff and the patients. Very simple, but it seems that the government is unwilling to even provide this type of simple, simple information. It's a little alarming when you think of the fact that there are so many complex decisions that are made in a government, yet they cannot provide you with a basic, basic piece of data.

Of course, no one would suggest that you would make a decision based purely on a ratio, that that would be the sole material determining factor when you make a decision, but of course that should be relevant. That should be relevant when one is looking at the overall system. You cannot take statistics in isolation, you cannot take them alone, but clearly they would be one factor that a person or a decision-maker would look at.

Of course, why this is even more important is that we saw in the throne speech – this is a continuation of the last session – that the Premier talked about being open and transparent, but unfortunately to date those are just words. She's unwilling to talk the talk, and the rejection of this question just illustrates that. Why not be open and transparent? Give the ratio. You know, it's a little shocking that we can't have this basic information.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to this question, why it's utterly important is that we get questions from our constituents. When we go back during constituency break or during the year, they often talk about how there is a shortage of front-line staff. We know this government can give all this money to the executives, we know they can give the chief financial officer for Alberta Health Services a \$1 million severance package and then an additional \$10,000 a month for 10 years, but when it comes to front-line staff, that's where they begin cutting. That's why this is important.

We get these questions from our constituents. They say, you know: what is the government's ratio with respect to front-line staff and patients? We'd like to be able to go to our constituents and say: "Here. This is the ratio that the government has thought is appropriate in these circumstances." But when they don't even give us the information, what are we supposed to tell our constituents when they ask us this specific question? I guess the answer is that the government is unwilling or unable to provide this basic information or they just don't know or they're deliberately hiding. We just don't know why they wouldn't provide this ratio.

I'm very pleased that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek brought this question forward so that we can now go to our constituents and say that we asked this very simple, basic question of the government to ensure that patients have the appropriate level of care with front-line staff, yet the Government House Leader came forward and said: "No. We can't provide that information. We're not going to provide that information." When you talk to the public, I think they're going to be astonished that the government cannot even provide this basic, basic information. You know, I guess that at this stage we'll simply go to our

constituents and explain that they're unwilling and unable to do this. Quite frankly, if you're unable and unwilling to do this, it's astonishing.

I think that it's important that we stand up for seniors, that we stand up for other patients that are receiving this care, and part of that is the appropriate level of front-line staff. Instead, of course, of having all these multiple levels of bureaucracy within Alberta Health Services, we need to ensure that there is the appropriate level of front-line staff. This ratio, if we were provided this information, would show where we are at with respect to front-line staff services for long-term care facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities.

I can appreciate the secondary information that we wanted to receive differentiated between the public and the private facilities so that you can use that evidence when making decisions on different topical matters. I appreciate the question from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a very important question asked by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Now, for a government that claims to be open and accountable, I don't understand why they're trying to be so closed and opaque. It's a very simple question. In fact, there are many other questions that need to be asked. The reason it's important to ask what the staffing ratios are in the private and public and nonprofit facilities is so we can assess the amount of care, the level of care that our seniors are getting. Equally important to me is: what kind of value for money are we getting?

Now, here are certain facts. Let's stick to facts. I had a major problem with this government when I was inside it. This was, in fact, the issue that got me expelled from government. I wrote an e-mail saying: "We're failing our seniors. We're neglecting them and failing them." The reality is that many of our seniors today lived very healthy lives. They had good nutrition, they moved a lot, they were very responsible, so they're living longer. The other issues are the fact that the medical system can do amazing things, so people are living longer with multiple problems, multiple complex problems. You know what? That's a good thing. The bad thing is that when people actually end up in care, they need a lot more care because of the complexity of their issues.

Now, in Ontario in wards they actually are so open and accountable that they put on the walls how many falls and how many bed ulcers patients in a medical ward have because simple measures like falls and bed ulcers are measurable signs of neglect. If you have lots of falls and bed ulcers, they lead to injuries, which actually lead to higher costs. This is not only a humanitarian issue; it's actually a money issue as well.

If you look at the data, the government has built thousands and thousands of beds, thousands of them, but the paramedics will anecdotally tell you – you know what? – that they're bringing a lot of people back from these facilities. Anecdotally, the paramedics get them out of there to the hospital. You know, there's an hon. member who's a paramedic. If he talks to his buddies, they'll tell him that, that they're actually just bringing them back to hospital because there's not enough staff to care for the complexity of that patient's care. Or if they fall – they break a hip; they break a wrist – if they get a bed ulcer or get an infection, they're coming back to the ER. They're getting stuck in the hospital again at \$2,000 a night or \$1,200 a night, whatever the cost may be.

In fact, we know that despite the thousands of beds they've built to fix the acute-care system, in two years they essentially haven't moved on their eight-hour performance measure to get admitted people upstairs because people are just coming back. This is just a very basic question that should be answered.

4:30

The other question that we actually need to ask is: if we build so many of these beds – God knows how many tens of millions, hundreds of millions have been spent to build these buildings – then why today do we have a hundred more seniors back in acute-care hospitals according to AHS's performance report of the last quarter? Why? We have a population that's actually getting younger. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in the country. So if we build so much seniors' capacity, why are there more people awaiting placement in the last quarter alone? I'll tell you why. You know, I suspect that they're probably just coming back.

The other question we have to ask, that should be answered: what is the occupancy rate of all these beds that have been built? Are they all filled up? Another thing we have to ask is: what is the return rate of people who get into these private facilities? How many of them end up back in hospital again?

The other question that we have is on the contract with the private providers. If they've contracted to give a hundred beds and if they're not all filled up, are you paying for the care component of all 100 beds? Are we paying for the care component of empty beds?

The other questions that need to be asked are: how much is being billed? What are the providers getting paid for the cost of an RN, an LPN, and a nursing aide? What are the providers getting paid, and what are the staff getting paid? How much is the profit component for each of the staff? Cost of staff plus the profit equals price.

I'll tell you that in the for-profit private model all evidence, international and local, in the many reports that have been done – these are facts, Mr. Speaker – is that the fact is that if seniors spend more time in bed, they fall more, they eat less, and they bathe less. These are facts. The neglect shows itself in numbers of falls and numbers of bed ulcers.

Pre-election we had many cases of seniors neglect. You know, it's not just having two baths a week. In fact, I'd challenge any of the government members to sit in a soiled incontinence pad and only get two baths a week. Jeez. You need two baths a day when that happens, Mr. Speaker. Right? Two baths a week is nice and all – it's a hundred per cent better than one – but it's still only about 20 per cent of the time a human being should bathe. So I give kudos to them for a big improvement.

Now, the question is: if they're not increasing the funding and the staffing levels, if we don't know what the staffing levels are, if we don't know that they've actually increased the number of staff, the qualifications of the staff, what is being neglected?

Mr. Speaker, the other question, actually, is not just the staffing ratios here, but it's: who is being placed in these beds that we currently have? Are we placing people that should not be placed? I do know as a front-line health professional – and there are a few on that side as well. There's a paramedic and a nurse, and they'll recognize these issues. The fact is that because you cut home care – you know, first they privatize the delivery of all of home care so that because of the profit, people actually get less care. If they cut that privatized home care even by 15 per cent, we know that every paramedic and emergency nurse and doctor, even the cleaning staff in the ER, will tell you that people are coming back to emergency because of cuts in home care. So are we actually

placing people in these facilities that can actually go home if we just had more home care?

Mr. Speaker, I do know that when I was in government as a parliamentary assistant, the deputy minister and I said: well, look, 50 per cent of people die within two years when they go into care. So we said: what's happening to those new beds – well, these old beds – that come up because somebody, unfortunately, died? Eighty per cent of the people coming to those beds were coming straight from home because of such inadequate home care. So we said: hey, maybe we just need to double up home care. You know what? Why don't we triple up home care? Why don't we give 10 times as much home care, so much home care so that you don't actually need to go into long-term care? You can stay in your own home, with your own partner, in your own community. You know, you'll pay your own lights, and you'll pay your own bills. In fact, I met with the Auditor General and asked him to do a forensic audit of value for money for home care and these beds. I said: "You've got to look at these things. You have to look at these things."

If we cannot get even basic information on what the staffing ratios are – these aren't even complex questions I've asked. These are not complex questions.

Now, I will say that there are a lot of very learned, very bright people on that side of the House. You know, I would ask the backbenchers to please ask these questions at caucus. Please. This is a money issue, and it's a human issue. I would contend that, hey, we can get Albertans better care and better value.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate. Five minutes.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and, I guess, add a few words on my question, that talks about the ratio of front-line staff to patients or residents in long-term facilities, seniors' lodges, and continuing care facilities, with ratios differentiated between public and private facilities. What I'm not pleased about is the fact that the government has obviously stood up and rejected this particular written question. I guess I shouldn't be surprised, yet I am a bit. It's been brought up before that you should never be surprised at a difficult question, especially when you have a government that doesn't want to give the answer.

What is surprising to me is the fact that while the government flatly rejects the particular question, they don't seem to be bothered by some of the comments that have been made as people have gotten up and spoken over and over again about the importance of dealing with this particular question. But, Mr. Speaker, we're in 2013 under a new Premier and a new government, so I guess we know exactly where we're going.

With that, I say, you know, that there are surprising things that are coming out in the budget that we're dealing with right now as we start digging through things within the budget. We all of a sudden find that the Health Facilities Review Committee is gone, a very intricate part of government who had the ability to go and check the facilities and question how people are being treated and the condition of the facility. The health advocate: gone. The seniors' advocate: gone. You know exactly the direction that the government is going.

I can tell you that over the last three years – and I've had some comments with my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, that spent two weeks travelling this wonderful province that we live in and spent a lot of time talking to people who deal with seniors, talking to seniors alone. She and I have had a talk over a beer, and

she shared some horrific stories of what she's hearing. I can tell you as the Seniors critic and someone who has a mom in a seniors' home, who's gotten to know the seniors in my mom's home very well, that we're heading down a very, very rocky path.

I understand where the government is going with their continuing care and how they're changing the continuing care model. I sometimes wonder if they know exactly what they're doing or how they see this continuing care model and if they really realize that putting seniors in continuing care – do they understand that over time the seniors' health needs change dramatically? The level of care – or I shouldn't say care. The care has always been exceptional, but the staffing is where there's a problem. You cannot blame the unbelievable RNs or LPNs or NAs that are working in seniors' facilities for that. They're there because they love seniors.

When you ask about the ratios, one must ask the question: well, do they understand the ratios? Do they think 121 to 1 is a good ratio? Is 89 to 1 a good ratio? I think people have to understand that it's about the level of care that you're providing at that particular time.

4:40

My friend from Edmonton-Centre, who I have a great deal of respect for for her debating ability, talks about the flu and about seniors not having the ability to get out of bed if they're suffering from throwing up or, for that matter, diarrhea and the LPN or the NA at that particular time having to take on the responsibility of not only trying to take care of seniors who are all suffering from the flu – I mean, I've been in the seniors' facilities enough times. When you walk in the door, you see the big sign that says that because of the flu they don't want anybody to visit, et cetera. They're just trying to cope at that particular time. Does the staff ratio change? No.

What bothers me more than anything is why the government is so reluctant to provide the numbers. To me, that sends a signal to all Albertans that this is not good news. You know, I look back over the last year . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 9 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Donovan	Sherman
Anglin	Forsyth	Stier
Barnes	Hale	Strankman
Bikman	McAllister	Swann
Bilous	Rowe	Towle
Blakeman	Saskiw	Wilson

Against the motion:

Allen	Hancock	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Horner	Olesen
Brown	Hughes	Olson
Calahasen	Jeneroux	Pastoor
Casey	Johnson, J.	Quadri
Cusanelli	Johnson, L.	Quest
Dallas	Khan	Rodney
Denis	Klimchuk	Sandhu
Dorward	Kubinec	Sarich

Drysdale	Lemke	Scott
Fenske	Leskiw	Starke
Fraser	McDonald	VanderBurg
Goudreau	McQueen	Weadick
Griffiths		
Totals:	For – 18	Against – 40

[Written Question 9 lost]

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

Nonrenewable Resource Royalty Revenues

Q10. Mr. Hale asked that the following question be accepted.
For the fiscal year 2012-2013, how many oil and gas operations paying reduced royalties will reach their payout stage, and what effect will that have on nonrenewable resource revenue?

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason I ask this question – and I have strong suspicion there is going to be an amendment to it shortly. The hon. Energy minister and I discussed this question before. I do think that the gas and oil revenues are important. I do believe that, you know, there are many projects that will be coming to the end of their reduced rate. I guess I'll ask this question a little later.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
I recognize the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I'd like to thank the Member for Strathmore-Brooks for his written question. He has asked how many "oil and gas operations" will reach payout in the 2012-13 fiscal year. Upon reviewing the question, I would ask that it be amended to the following: "For the fiscal year 2012-2013, how many oil sands producers paying reduced royalties will reach their payout stage, and what effect will that have on nonrenewable resource revenue?"

The original question could appear to confuse the conventional oil and gas royalty regime with the oil sands royalty regime, which are two quite different structures. The conventional oil and gas royalty regime is based on a sliding scale formula that adjusts according to price and, of course, well productivity. There's no concept of project payout in that particular regime, so the question wouldn't actually apply to conventional oil and gas regimes. However, the oil sands royalty regime does include a project payout concept in structure. The royalty kicks into a higher level after payout is completed, so that actually applies more directly, more correctly in this respect.

If there are other questions around that, of course, I'm always happy to talk to the hon. member about it. If he has other questions, I'm happy to discuss them with him.

I thereby move the amendment to Written Question 10. I move that Written Question 10 be amended by striking out "oil and gas operations" and substituting "oil sands producers."

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. minister has moved an amendment to the written question.

Speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to accept this question as amended. As the hon. Energy minister said, I will be

asking him other questions with regard to conventional oil and gas.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 10 as amended carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Property Rights

505. Mr. Strankman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation to amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to ensure that all Albertans have an inalienable right to full, fair, and timely compensation with recourse to the courts when a new government initiative negatively impacts the value of their property.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know it's a long ways out there, but thank you for remembering.

It's an honour to stand before this Assembly and speak on the issue that has always been close to my activist's heart. It's property rights. Property rights have been built into our laws for the past 800 years, since the Magna Carta. They guarantee every citizen the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness without the interference of government. There is nothing that is more important when we talk about good government than preserving this right. It is a cornerstone of a prosperous society and a fully functioning democracy.

5:00

The Alberta Bill of Rights was created by the legendary Premier Lougheed to restrain the government's power and to defend individual freedoms. As we have seen with bills 19, 24, 36, and 50 and most recently with Bill 2, the rights enshrined in the Alberta Bill of Rights are not the ones the government feels that they must respect. This is a disappointment to me and a failure to Albertans on the part of this PC government.

The original Alberta Bill of Rights listed six fundamental human rights. The first was the protection of property rights. Let us not forget that Premier Peter Lougheed put the protection of property rights ahead of religion, speech, assembly and association, and press. The government has chosen to ignore the original intent of this bill, and thus it is necessary, I believe, to strengthen it. That is what my motion proposes to do.

Currently the bill recognizes "enjoyment of property." While I have heard from Albertans that they respect the original intent of the bill, it is evident to them that due to the government's blatant disregard of property rights, the word "enjoyment" is not strong enough. Mr. Speaker, according to Wikipedia

property is any physical or intangible entity that is owned by a person or jointly by a group of people or a legal entity like a corporation. Depending on the nature of the property, an owner of property has the right to consume, sell, rent, mortgage, transfer, exchange or destroy it, or to exclude others from doing these [same] things.

Replacing "enjoyment" with the "inalienable right to full, fair, and timely compensation with recourse to the courts when a new

government initiative negatively impacts the value of their property” will affirm that the right to property is respected by this Legislature. It will also protect future generations from governments that believe they have the right to disregard hard-working Albertans’ property rights, whether they are urban or rural. I have a personal affection for property rights since I was one of the 13 farmers who were arrested for what I would call un-joyment, not being allowed to sell my property, my wheat, at a fair and marketable price.

Finally, property rights played a major role in encouraging me to run for the Wildrose Party in 2012. As a landowner, farmer, and rancher I knew the ultimate destructiveness that could come from a government who no longer respected property rights and believed that they had an inalienable right to push through legislation like bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. I also know that the government’s blatant disrespect for property rights led to the election of 17 Wildrose members on this side of the Assembly.

I ask everyone in the Legislature to support this motion. To those in government: if they never meant to threaten the property rights of Albertans, then they should prove it by supporting this motion. If they don’t, they are showing their true colours. They are showing that they put the grand plans of the PC government ahead of rights and fairness to all individuals and Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this forward. Indeed, with his background dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board and how the Liberal government used to treat our farmers here and his specific issues, I really think that this is not a man who is just any Joe Albertan. This is a man who actually has dealt with property rights on his own, and I want to say thank you to him for bringing this forward.

Now, Mr. Speaker, although I may appreciate where he’s coming from, I think the endgame, what I personally would like to see, may be a little bit different. I wanted to talk a bit about how our government continues to respect property rights and how it continues to expand the role of places like the Property Rights Advocate.

Before I do that, I want to mention first off the Expropriation Act, which has been here since – I don’t know the exact year but much longer than I’ve been a member. I was elected in ’08. The Expropriation Act governs expropriation of land in Alberta. It guarantees compensation for expropriated land. And guess what? It should. It also provides for due process, including notice to an affected landowner, the ability to object to the “necessity” or “reasonableness” – and I use the last two words in quotation marks – of the expropriation and to obtain a hearing before an inquiry officer, and the determination of compensation by the Surface Rights Board or the Land Compensation Board when the owner and the expropriating authority cannot agree. As with any body, Mr. Speaker, again, these are reviewable in the Court of Queen’s Bench in Alberta on the grounds of a denial of natural justice if that, in fact, is the case.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans expect their government to show leadership in planning for the future, keeping in mind long-term outcomes and not just political expediency for the day. That is what our government is doing. We have thoroughly debated in this Legislature over the past year numerous bills that allow for effective land-use planning where at the same time we’re strengthening property rights. In fact, members from

the opposition have praised some of our legislation. I’ll say a quote again:

At first glance much of this legislation may be interpreted as a regression on property rights, but it would be a very large mistake to think so as this bill, in my view, does the exact opposite. It strengthens landowner rights.

I would agree with that suggestion even though I believe the member who indicated that has indicated that he changed his mind. Now, as a lawyer of over 12 years, I’m sure that the member at the time read and analyzed the legislation and came to the conclusion that, in fact, the legislation strengthened landowner rights.

I would also like to talk about one initiative within the Ministry of Justice that I believe illustrates this government’s commitment to property rights, and that is, of course, Alberta’s new Property Rights Advocate, located not in Edmonton, not in Calgary but in Lethbridge, who has received bipartisan support from this Legislature.

As I have discussed, Alberta has numerous legislation, be it the Appropriation Act, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act . . .

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order noted. Go ahead, Member for Airdrie.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) obviously we don’t want to say something in here that is going to incite any disorder. So far this side of the House in no way, shape, or form has ever endorsed the straw-man Property Rights Advocate or whatever you call it, the property rights grief counsellor. We certainly as an opposition do not support that waste of taxpayers’ money. Frankly, the person that was appointed there is a PC partisan, and we do not support that as a caucus. There may be one or two members that have expressed some friendliness towards that individual, but certainly as a caucus we do not support it, so it does not have bipartisan support. We want to make that clear on the record.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Maybe, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, a clarification might be in order?

Mr. Denis: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Denis: My exact verbiage, Mr. Speaker, was that I said: “bipartisan support.” At no time did I suggest this particular member or any member of his caucus. I also would refer you, respectfully, to when the Property Rights Advocate Act was passed. My recollection is that it was not totally drawn across partisan lines; rather, there were members of the opposition. Again, I did not mention this member or any other member in my comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

For clarification, this party was not singled out. Hon. Member for Airdrie, are you satisfied with that?

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely satisfied.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much.

We would continue with your speech, hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the ruling that there was no point of order.

Debate Continued

Mr. Denis: I wanted to mention that this is why one of the key functions of the Property Rights Advocate is to provide this information about the Property Rights Advocate to the public. Mr. Speaker, this includes, without limitation, providing information to landowners about their right to compensation during expropriations and other property rights impairments for which compensation is payable.

Although I have mentioned that the Property Rights Advocate is in fact located in Lethbridge, it's not designed just to appeal to rural Albertans. I have heard from many urban Albertans who have issues with their particular local city or municipality trying to expropriate their own property. This Property Rights Advocate shall be there for them as well.

5:10

It also will provide information on new legislation. It also will identify dispute resolution mechanisms for landowners, and it will help landowners navigate the expropriation process. Again, Mr. Speaker, nothing wrong with lawyers. Far be it from me if people want to pay legal fees, but at the same point in time I don't believe that people should have to go and hire a lawyer to get information about a complex and important issue. That is why under the leadership of this Premier our government is moving in this direction.

A second key function of the advocate is to hear complaints from affected landowners and prepare a report on any findings and recommendations that result from that complaint. This report will then be provided to the landowner, the appropriate board, and any other third party the advocate deems necessary.

Third, the advocate is required to provide an annual report to you, Mr. Speaker, not to me, as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. This report will outline the activities of the Property Rights Advocate office during the year as well as make recommendations on property rights issues. [interjections] I will continue with my speech and ignore the jeers and catcalls opposite.

Mr. Speaker, as I have outlined, first, how this government protects Alberta's property rights through legislation and, second, outlined how we have an advocate to advocate for Albertans' property rights on their own behalf, this is why I oppose this member's motion, made by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, to amend the Alberta Bill of Rights given what our government is already doing in this area. We already have strong property rights protections in this province, and Albertans can rest assured that under this government we always will have strong property rights protections.

Finally, I just would like to mention one other thing. The Member for Drumheller-Stettler had talked about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are obviously noble goals, but they are nowhere in our Constitution. Rather, our Constitution in this country talks about peace, order, and good government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others to speak to the motion? I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Here we go. That is correct, Mr. Speaker. I will guarantee you we will go to the carpet on this one.

Property rights are something that I'm quite familiar with, and I'm also quite familiar with the issue that this government does not respect property rights, has never respected property rights.

Mrs. Leskiw: Oh, get off it.

Mr. Anglin: I'm on it. I'm on it, good member. This member here from Cold Lake . . .

Mrs. Leskiw: Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Anglin: . . . from Bonnyville-Cold Lake had a chance to come out and debate me on property rights and failed to show up if I remember correctly.

Now, this issue dealing with property rights is a significant issue, and it goes beyond land. It deals also with business property rights. It deals with intellectual property rights. Those are also property rights.

I'm going to bring up an example. There was a business right here in Edmonton that was developing a piece of land, and the hon. Minister of ESRD might remember this gentleman. She met with him. His business was developing a piece of land on the south side of Edmonton, one whole quarter section, a \$30 million investment, and this is significant. It was an oilfield service company, and all they needed to do as part of this development was take an old dugout probably created in 1960. It was dry. I'll stand corrected if any member wants to correct me, but I believe it was called the Stewart and Kantrud, however you pronounce it, methodology on the reclamation of wetlands, where it's nothing more than an environmental study that actually declares what level of wetlands are being reclaimed and then there is a donation or a fee that goes to somebody like Ducks Unlimited to reclaim that section of wetland. In this case, it was a dry dugout.

Now, this business was fully aware of this. They had lawyers working on their development, and then they had their environmental engineering firm work up the study, everything according to the practices that this province has had in place for quite a long time. Unbeknown to them, unbeknown to his environmental engineering firm, unbeknown to his law firm that worked on his behalf, ESRD showed up and said: oh, by the way, the \$3,000 that you were going to donate to Ducks Unlimited is actually \$3 million, and that old system does not apply.

Now, where is that business's rights in dealing with this issue? This was significant, and they were up in arms. I believe the minister may have had to settle this, but I will tell you something. There was nothing in law to protect this developer, nothing at all. ESRD, this government, owns that wetland. Private businesses, private owners pay taxes on that. We had a system in place, and without telling anyone, now all of a sudden the first business along was notified that the system has changed. Yet the businesses behind them were never notified, and they were still going by the old system.

Now, without some sort of recourse it makes it very difficult to conduct business, and it makes it very difficult to actually go about doing your business. I believe that's the whole reason behind our single regulator, that we would streamline regulation, make it more efficient so that there would not be excess delays. This was one prime example where a business was affected by this. I don't know exactly how they resolved it, but I do know this. If they were not going to be able to resolve it, they were willing to break the law and let the government sue them and deal with the issue then in court on how this was to be resolved. All that business was looking for was to be treated fairly, fairly and justly,

something that this government, this party refuses to put into law and has rejected in the past. Here we are dealing with some very basic issues.

To the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: to say that the Expropriation Act applies is an interesting observation because if you look under the Land Assembly Project Area Act when it was first drafted, the Expropriation Act in particular was excluded. The law said initially that the Expropriation Act would not apply, and we had to fight, not here inside this Chamber but outside in rural communities before that party, that government would amend it. But when you amended it, you didn't say that the Expropriation Act will apply or shall apply. What it did was that it went silent on the matter. It went silent. If you read the act the way it is currently amended today, this government still has the ability to circumvent the act. That was one of the biggest problems and still exists to be one of the biggest problems with that act.

We've had in place for quite a long period of time an Expropriation Act that was similar to or even better than in other jurisdictions. All jurisdictions have this methodology, have statutes in place so they can expropriate property in the public interest. I'm going to talk about the public interest here in a second and for a long time if I could. The Expropriation Act works. It did work. It has worked, yet this government actually tried to prohibit the Expropriation Act under the Land Assembly Project Area Act. So now what it has done is that under that act, if you look at section 3(1), it says that the minister may make regulation concerning any type of use over any kind of matter, and if you leave anything else out, it just basically makes sure it circumvents the whole process on any other issue dealing with that property.

Now, I for one am in favour of utility corridors. I think they're a good idea. It's how you do it that makes it a bad thing. You have to do it right. People need a mechanism so that their property interests are protected. There aren't very many property owners out there that do not understand that we have to sell land or give up land for things like roads, for pipelines, for transmission lines. That's never been the issue. The issue has always been: are they going to be treated fairly and justly? That's always been the argument. That's always been the fight. It's not just about compensation. It's about respect, it's about dignity, and it's about justice. That's been the problem, yet this party in power has not figured that part out, and it has caused more problems than it's been worth. You're looking at one of them. We caused one of those problems. How did the government react? Well, they tapped my phones.

I will tell you this. The whole issue of embedding these property rights into something like the Bill of Rights does now give us some sort of protection when these other pieces of legislation come along.

Now, I want to talk about section 19, actually, of what we referred to as the land stewardship act. When that act was written, the former agricultural minister actually said that that section enhanced people's rights to compensation, which is a very odd statement because that section at that time basically stated that no person has a right to compensation by reason of this act or any regulation made thereunder. End of story. So why did the government write that in there? Well, I presume – and maybe I shouldn't presume. I never took it that they weren't going to compensate property owners, but I took it that they wanted to make sure the property owner didn't have any rights to compensation or any recourse.

5:20

I always felt that the MLAs and cabinet ministers who were

selling the bill fully believed that they would compensate property owners, but the act itself said that nobody had any rights to compensation. That section was changed, and now what it says is, quite simply, that you as a property owner have a right to compensation by reason of this act and any regulation made thereunder. That's a good thing except for one problem. There are no rights to compensation under that act. Giving them a right to compensation within the act, but then the act is hollow or silent, doesn't really achieve a thing.

So what we've done is actually take something that was quite blatant and draconian, in my view, and just went silent on the matter. The way the law currently reads is that there is really no right to compensation. If you check under section 19.1 of the act, what it states there is, when you get down all the way to subsection (9), that nobody has a right to compensation by this section. It's quite interesting to go full circle around that bill.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in opposition to this motion. I'll outline my position. I do not doubt for a second that property rights need to be protected, and I believe everyone in the House would agree with that. I believe that the current government went about it all wrong when they introduced Bill 36, Bill 50, Bill 19, Bill 24. The issues that I have are several. Property rights are already enshrined within the Alberta Bill of Rights. Alberta does have a patchwork of legislation that deals with compensation, and it's fair to say that we need to ensure that legislation is full, fair, and timely and that there is recourse to the courts when the process is not followed to a T, to the letter of the law.

The Alberta NDP opposition were generally supportive of the idea that there needs to be fair compensation when land is expropriated, but the idea of value in this motion is too radical for us. Even when you compare property legislation to the United States, this piece of legislation, or this motion, is far more radical than what exists in the United States. There are possible unintended consequences, and that's what draws my concern and the concern of my colleagues.

When we look at the terms "value" and "property," we don't have sufficient definitions in our court system, according to our legal advice, on those two different terms. So there might be unintended consequences, where individuals or corporations benefit from compensation for value that would otherwise have been created either in the future or in lost opportunity.

The definition of property: I mean, that is one problem. What would apply to this definition? I'll give you some examples. We can all imagine a field of wheat. What about the lost revenues in the future for wheat that was never grown? What about intangible properties such as proprietary information in the seed used to grow the wheat or the brand recognition that might be used by the farmer in the farmers' market or in sales of wheat now allowed with the abolishment of the Wheat Board?

In some legal circles the idea of new property has been popular. This can include government pensions, disability benefits, marriage and separation benefits, labour laws, et cetera. What would be the ramifications of these if they were ever recognized in Alberta's jurisprudence as property under this motion? Interestingly, would people on AISH be able to sue the government if benefits were ever decreased, even indirectly?

Property might someday be defined as income or rents. Labour legislation such as minimum wage standards might sometimes affect the bottom line of corporations. These regulations can hurt

the bottom line of corporations. Would companies then be able to sue governments for lost income if they start to change our labour codes?

Moving to the definition of value, one of the biggest grey areas pertains to value itself. Nowhere in North American law is value protected as a right. The only thing that's protected is the right to use land or property. Even in America, where private property and the right to fair compensation have been enshrined in their constitution, there is no reference to value. In the U.S. one must show, essentially, a total loss of any economic value in order to give rise to compensation. Without going into details, some public thinkers have pointed to the chilling effect on decision-making that these laws have had. Think about trying to implement environmental legislation, for example. We should certainly study what effect it has had in the U.S. and how that would inform the Alberta debate.

Let's consider how it would be inherently very difficult to determine value in a couple of different scenarios. One example is the power line debate. While we sympathize with those indirectly affected such as farmers where the power lines run near but not on their property, it would require a significant amount of effort to determine what the negative value of those lines would be to the indirectly affected farmer. What would be the trigger for compensation? Would there be a minimum amount? Conceivably, people would have a right even if the amount was one penny.

The idea of value might also be applied to opportunity cost. Imagine that a landowner is about to receive a windfall of profit when the government decides to allow a nuclear power plant on his land. Then at the eleventh hour the government decides that it was following the wrong course and cancels the project. Should the government then be on the hook to pay the landowner for his lost revenues that would have been there if a nuclear plant was built?

The idea of changes to value also implies causation. Proving causation has proved to be very difficult in the past, for one thing, and it would involve serious legal costs if it always had to be determined in court. Some people might not be able to afford this, then limiting the access to justice. If causation was left to the courts, it would cost the province a lot of money in judges. As well, the amount of litigation that would come from this would be overwhelming. So there should be more clarity on the issue of what value is as well as other issues such as the definition of property before allowing the courts to be flooded.

Looking at this principle and how it applies to corporations because they're essentially treated as individuals under our laws, we must also consider their angle. There are a multitude of ways the government might impact the value of land or property owned by corporations with regulatory decisions. For example, under this motion it's conceivable that heavy industries might be able to sue the government when they implement higher air emission standards since a government initiative negatively impacted the value of their property. New mine reclamation rules might also decrease the amount of money a corporation can make off the land, thereby reducing its value.

What about the impact of Crown corporations who may at some point find themselves in direct competition with a private firm providing the same service? Would this also fall under government initiative? Is this the intent of the motion, really, to support corporations?

What impact would it have on other forms of government, namely municipalities? Back in the '80s the Alberta government was opposed to adding property rights to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because they were afraid it would create a standard set of rules around land use for the whole country. They did not want to lose their ability to develop their own land-use

laws. This motion would likely be vehemently opposed by municipalities for the same reason.

Municipalities often make zoning changes that impact the value of property in any given area. Sometimes it increases the value; sometimes it decreases it. Would municipalities, then, be on the hook to compensate landowners or businesses affected? What if a municipality decided they want to tackle urban sprawl and rezoned land that had already been purchased by a developer? Should municipalities be on the hook to pay for the costs associated with real estate speculation? What about if someone feels that a new bus station has negatively impacted their property value? What if they have a home business that was affected in a positive or negative way?

5:30

This motion would have a chilling effect on the ability of any government to undertake initiatives in the public interest that might affect the value of a private interest. While we should not burden individuals unfairly with the costs of implementing the public interest, governments must be allowed flexibility to deal with public policy issues. In order to pass the test of fairness under the law, there would need to be a uniform system developed to deal with any and all kinds of scenarios that municipalities might face. This uniformity might take away from creative initiatives to deal with the issues of compensation when the public good is involved. In my short time I haven't even begun to touch on how this might impact aboriginal communities and aboriginal titles.

It is, therefore, my position and the position of the Alberta NDP opposition that although it may be a laudable goal to ensure fair and timely compensation, there are many problems with this motion, and it could have a number of unintended consequences. It would be prudent to have a significant amount of legal, social, and economic study of this type of motion before it should ever be considered by this House.

Therefore, I stand in opposition to this motion and ask for more research to be done on protecting landowners' rights without resorting to such radical proposals as this one.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next two speakers, the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, followed by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really a pleasure to rise today and talk about Motion 505. Certainly, myself as minister and our ministry do not support this motion. We don't support it for the following reasons. This government is well aware that property rights are an important issue for many Albertans, and we have taken every step to protect those rights.

As you know and many in this House know, we spent a lot of time, myself personally and other members of cabinet and other government MLAs, travelling across the province and talking to property owners about their rights. The things that we heard in all of the communities across the province when we chatted were things that were important to them. Property owners knew that we needed to plan this province not just for today but for future generations. They know that it's important that our kids and our grandkids will have land that's set aside for economic development, for recreation, for important heritage, and for important wildlife species. They want all of that. But with that, they also wanted to make sure that if their land was taken for the greater good, they would be fairly compensated, that they would have consultation about that, and that they would have access to the courts.

Indeed, the other part that they brought up to me many times and, I know, to our colleagues that travelled along with me: they wanted someone there to help them. Many of these landowners had only dealt with an industry company or the government once or twice in their lifetime, and they didn't feel they had the information that they needed to make the decisions. So they asked for some help. To respond to that, not only did we do that, but we made sure in our legislation that compensation, consultation, and access to the courts are there. Indeed, we put in a Property Rights Advocate, someone that will be there for the landowners to make sure, first of all in the education portion, that they can educate them on what their rights are, and second, when they have individual questions, they can go to the Property Rights Advocate.

I can tell you from travelling the province, over 20 different communities over a couple of months, that in every community people wanted to make sure fundamentally that those were in place for them. They understand the greater good. They also understand long-term land-use planning. That's why the Land Stewardship Act provides Albertans with fair, full, and timely compensation to the courts. The intent of the act has always been to protect individual property rights, and we made that purpose even more explicit when we introduced amendments to the act in 2011.

The purpose of these amendments was to clearly establish that the government will always – always – respect the individual property rights of citizens, that government will never limit any existing right to compensation for land, and that government will respect all existing provisions for land-use decisions. These amendments also give property owners more options if their land is required for public use, and they ensure that landowners will receive applicable compensation when their land is designated as part of a project. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. The safeguards are already in place. They already exist. The legislation is in place.

The desire to listen and to respond to public concerns on this matter is something that this government does and is concerned to do. That's why the Premier established the Property Rights Task Force in November 2011 and the minister recently announced that person in the position, with the office being opened.

We heard from more than 1,400 Albertans across the province. We acted quickly on the recommendations of that task force when we received them. Albertans told us they wanted government to establish an independent Property Rights Advocate, and that's exactly what we have done. Alberta's first Property Rights Advocate was named in December 2012, and his office in Lethbridge is now operational. On the advice of the task force we have also committed to reviewing relevant provisions of the Expropriation Act and the Surface Rights Act as well as the compensation guidelines applied by the Surface Rights Board and the Land Compensation Board.

In short, this government's existing legislation already provides property rights guarantees, and we are committed to responding quickly and decisively to remaining public concerns that arise on this topic. This motion, therefore, is unnecessary, and we do not support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to commend the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing forth this motion. I wholeheartedly support it, and I feel it should be

resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to

introduce legislation to amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to ensure that all Albertans have an inalienable right to full, fair, and timely compensation with recourse to the courts when a new government initiative negatively impacts the value of their property.

A number of reasons for this. First of all, in my opinion, a strong economy, strong individual rights, and the foundation of our wealth start with three things: property rights, where a government knows its limits, where the line is drawn between an individual's rights and responsibilities and the government's, and individuals have the opportunity to grow wealth for their families, themselves, and their communities; secondly, stable electric costs – and we know where Bill 50 is taking us in this province with that – and competitive taxation and regulation. We have seen Manitoba and other western provinces reduce their corporate tax lower than ours, and we know that the CFIB continually gives Alberta a failing grade on removing regulation.

Property rights is an area that Alberta can excel in and Alberta can take the leadership in for the benefit of our wealth and the benefit of our individuals. Canada lacks a legal framework that compels government to provide restitution when it infringes on individual property rights in the pursuit of the public good. Again, Alberta can become a national leader in this area. Alberta's Bill of Rights was a good idea, but it didn't go far enough. The clause that protects property rights is followed by this phrase: "and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law." We know what due process of law is: Bill 36, Bill 19, Bill 24, Bill 50, and Bill 2.

I represent Cypress-Medicine Hat. As I've indicated before and as most of you are maybe aware, it's about the south 25 per cent of Medicine Hat and the town of Redcliff, where about 65 or 70 per cent of the voters and constituents live. The other 35 per cent of the residents are in two counties, Cypress county and Forty Mile county, making my constituency approximately 60 miles by 80 miles.

Ms Calahasen: That's nothing.

Mr. Barnes: That's nothing. I've heard that.

Well, speaking of that's nothing, Bill 36, the regional advisory committee plan, has come out in our area with some preamble, and in Cypress county my guess is that some 30 or 35 per cent of it – 30 or 35 per cent – is designated as potential conservation areas. Some 10 or 15 per cent of Forty Mile county has been designated in brown as potential conservation areas.

5:40

When we read the preamble that was provided in the stuff that is apparently quite far from regulations, it says something like potential conservation areas will be voluntary on deeded land and may be enforced on leased land. It seems like not too big a deal except when you realize that the vast, vast majority of ranchers and farmers in these two counties own a combination of leased land and deeded land. Sometimes these ranches have been in their family for six generations. Amazingly, some of those parcels of land, that these people have had good stewardship of, paid a tremendous amount of taxes on, and raised wonderful Albertans on, I'm told have never ever been patented, never ever been deeded for whatever reason. So now we're looking at a situation: property rights reduced, impacted by what these bills are doing.

What's the difference, you say? I know a rancher in the special areas who wants to move on, wants to sell his land. He's had it on the market for about a year. He has told me that his deeded land has attracted strong offers, but he's having tremendous trouble getting what used to be fair value on his leased land. He's farmed

it for years and years. He paid money for it. It's been a mixed bag how the government on the other side of this floor has treated all these lease owners.

It's also interesting to me that three time – three times – in my campaign and once after, when town hall meetings were called to discuss these things, you get some 200 pickups in the parking lot, people wanting to protect their property rights, strong Albertans, people who love Albertans, people that have built Alberta, people that want their property rights protected.

How does all of this matter? I have a copy of the *Financial Post* here, and I'd like to read a headline from about three months ago. Walmart Canada is taking 39 of the leases on which Target Canada bought on option to take over from Zellers – so we're talking leases – in a \$1.8 billion deal. So Walmart is buying from Target, which bought from Zellers, a transaction of \$1.8 billion. My goodness, what tremendous wealth for Albertans. What tremendous wealth for Canadians. What an opportunity for society to tax some of this wealth to build education, health care, the programs that we need, not the type of thing that I would want to see destroyed.

I will close with, again, my support for this motion, my support of individual property rights. I would ask others to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Motion 505 brought forward by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. On a subject that the opposition purports to be passionate about, it saddens me to see so many empty seats across the aisle.

Motion 505 urges the Alberta government to further entrench property rights in the Alberta Bill of Rights. As we well know, this bill is a fundamental piece of legislation that serves to protect the basic rights of Albertans. The bill is formed on the principle that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and enjoyment of property and that no private property shall be taken for public without going through legal proceedings.

Section 1 of the bill states:

It is hereby recognized and declared that in Alberta there exist without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, the following human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely:

- (a) the right of the individual to liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;
- (b) the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law;
- (c) freedom of religion.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who brought forward this motion is proposing we add the following under section 1 of the Alberta human rights bill for greater certainty: the right to enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law under this act shall be construed such that where a law of Alberta authorizes the Crown to acquire property owned by a person other than the Crown, that person is entitled to "full, fair, and timely compensation [and right of] recourse to the courts" to determine the compensation payable. The addition of this clause to the Alberta human rights bill would be redundant. It is stated in the aforementioned quote from the Bill of Rights that an individual has the right to property and the enjoyment of that property. It is only through the due process of law that a person may be deprived of that property.

Mr. Speaker, the bill already ensures property rights are legally protected. With that, any seizures of property need to have legal

cause and are subject to legal recourse. There would be no benefit because the bill already protects property rights. There is no point in adding that clause simply to reiterate something which is already there.

Today I'm standing against Motion 505 because it doesn't improve the Alberta Bill of Rights. If anything, it detracts from it. I encourage my fellow members to do the same. I am proud to point out that Alberta leads Canada in the protection of property rights and that no other jurisdiction safeguards those rights like this province does. For the reasons I have articulated, I will not be supporting this motion, and I encourage my fellow members to do likewise.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks on Motion 505. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, everyone. I would be remiss if I didn't speak a little bit on this particular topic, I would suggest. I'd just like to thank the minister for getting up and speaking the words that she did, making us aware that she was well aware of the issue. I have no doubt of that. Over the past couple of years, since I've been involved with this situation, I've attended many of the meetings that she made mention of, and I've seen with my own eyes how powerful this has been, how many hours were spent by a lot of people travelling all over Alberta to ensure that they were not only informed on what was happening but that they had their voices heard. I assure you that at most of the meetings, including the most famous one at Eckville, a lot of voices were definitely heard.

You know, we have to look back, I think, and look at the situation over those past few years and realize that an awful lot of work and time was put in both by the people of this wonderful province and also by the people involved in legislation. I often think that there's got to be a reason why this occurred. It seems to me the basic reason is that we don't have property rights enshrined in any of our basic laws. Unlike the United States and most European countries where they are constitutionally protected, that's not the case here. I've had volumes of information sent to me from as far away as Australia, where they're debating these very same issues. One has to wonder why we can't do something to remedy this situation.

I speak in support of this legislation that is being proposed by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, to my right. I think that we have to keep in mind that these things underpin economic rights, and they're kind of critical to the foundation of our democracies. We have an awful lot of things that we could entrench, I suspect, in the Alberta Bill of Rights, but this has got to be a very, very crucial one. Just look back and think: would we have had to spend all these weeks and months and perhaps two years of debating and arguing over this very fundamental thing if we'd had that in the Bill of Rights?

I leave you with that final point. That's my key point for my submission. I thank you for the time this evening.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to speak today on Motion 505, brought forward by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. The stated purpose of Motion 505 is to entrench property rights in the Alberta Bill of Rights. This motion stems from a principle that everyone has the right to life, liberty,

security of the person, enjoyment of property and that no private property should be taken for public use without full and fair and timely compensation.

Mr. Speaker, this is by no means the first time a motion of this kind has been brought forward by the opposition. In fact, the proposal was previously introduced as a private member's bill by a former member and current adviser of the opposition. This attempt at legislation was previously defeated because the government already has in place protections necessary in the form of consultation, compensation, and court access. In addition, we have initiated ongoing consultations with landowners on the issue of property rights, and Albertans recognize that.

Mr. Speaker, during her bid for the leadership our Premier pledged to add consultation, an explicit compensation model, and access to the courts moving forward with land-use legislation, and on November 24 of last year the consultation process was initiated by the Property Rights Task Force. The hon. Minister of ESRD led this initiative, as she mentioned, which had the objective to talk with Albertans about the approach they would like to see taken to property rights in our province. The task force met directly with some 1,100 Albertans in 10 communities and heard from more than 300 others online, via e-mail, or over the phone. Additionally, they met with a number of stakeholder representatives in an effort to strengthen the individual property rights of landowners and ensure that all voices were heard.

In response to this consultation our government further enshrined our commitment to protecting property rights in law. Mr. Speaker, Bill 6, the Property Rights Advocate Act, was passed last year, establishing the Property Rights Advocate, which has been mentioned several times. Bill 6 supports the government's position that landowners must have recourse to an independent tribunal, the courts, or both for the purpose of determining full and fair compensation for access to their land. Reporting to the Minister of Justice, who has also been up, the Property Rights Advocate's office shares independent and impartial information about property rights and helps individuals determine the appropriate resolution mechanism should a problem arise, including the courts.

Mr. Speaker, the advice of Albertans is invaluable to the future of this province, and that's why the information received by the task force has directly influenced policy development by this government. In May 2011 we passed the amendments to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act with Bill 10, and this bill was a response to Albertans' concerns about property rights and the pressures of growth. The amendments made a clear statement that government respects property and other rights of individuals. Throughout these consultations Albertans asked for an additional awareness of property rights. They asked for and received an active and ongoing consultation process. Further, Albertans also asked that they be consulted on plans to accommodate growth.

Out of concern expressed by Albertans specific to aged industrial infrastructure impacts on land, the government has committed to undertaking a comprehensive review of the requirements for industry to reclaim and remediate land and remove unused infrastructure. This process will also include examination of standards and guidelines which regulatory bodies use to apply those requirements. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this review and examination are a result of a successful consultation process with Albertans. This government has already committed to taking steps to engage even further with Albertans on property rights.

This motion simply reiterates past proposals and existing regulation and legislation. If you ask me, Mr. Speaker, this motion lacks the common sense that this member's party claims to

advocate for. It's out of touch with the reality that people's property rights are well protected in this province and rightly so. The government has not only passed and amended legislation . . . [A timer sounded] Et cetera, et cetera.

I will not be supporting, obviously, Motion 505.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler to close debate on Motion 505.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting last few minutes here in listening to the responses. I've got a list, and hopefully it'll be coherent as I proceed through it.

I enjoyed the quick and early response of the Member for Calgary-Acadia. You know, I've lived near the province of Saskatchewan, and I've seen these products of the social gospel throughout my lifetime. I've taken great interest in that, but sometimes their arguments aren't relevant. Now we've seen the response to the social gospel of Saskatchewan with a new government. It's quite enlightening, and I'm pleased and proud to actually be close to Saskatchewan for the first time in about 45 years.

I'd like to also speak to my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, where he commented about the abolishment of the CWB. At a further occasion I'll have to advise him on the incorrectness of that statement because the CWB has not been abolished.

I'd also like to speak to Bill 2, that's been brought forward by the present government, wherein they talk about the public interest. Nowhere in that bill is public interest mentioned. This party tried to add that as an amendment, and we were succinctly and roundly voted down in our attempts to put that in there.

I'd like to continue on with the Member for Stony Plain, wherein he talked about the human rights bill. This isn't the subject of our discussion. The subject of our discussion is the Bill of Rights, so I think there is a miscommunication there going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say that I put the motion forward in a democratic fashion, and I'll stand to the vote of the House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:57 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Hale	Stier
Barnes	Pedersen	Strankman
Bikman	Rowe	Towle
Donovan		

Against the motion:

Allen	Hancock	Olson
Bhardwaj	Hughes	Pastoor
Bilous	Jeneroux	Quadri
Calahasen	Johnson, L.	Quest

Casey	Khan	Rodney	Goudreau	Oberle	Weadick
Dallas	Klimchuk	Sandhu	Griffiths	Olesen	Young
Denis	Kubinec	Sarich	Totals:	For – 10	Against – 36
Dorward	Lemke	Scott	[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]		
Drysdale	McDonald	Starke	[The Assembly adjourned at 6:10 p.m.]		
Fenske	McQueen	VanderBurg			

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Telephone: 780.427.1302

Other inquiries:

Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1875