



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

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Thursday, March 14, 2013

Issue 36a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 14, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and guests, let us pray. May the lessons we learn today help guide and shape our thoughts tomorrow, and may we transfer those learned benefits into actions that will truly help the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured indeed to be able to introduce Mr. Murray Dorin, who was an MP for Edmonton Northwest; Mr. Ken Epp, who was an MP for Edmonton-Sherwood Park; and it's my great honour to introduce to the Assembly today Senator Betty Unger, representing Alberta. Everybody in the Assembly may know that Senator Unger was recently appointed by the Prime Minister. However, she was the first Senator to be duly elected in the country of Canada, indeed by legislation passed in this Assembly. Please stand – you are standing – and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: A sincere welcome to our special visitors. Thank you for joining us.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the grade 12 students from Consort school. They came here over a great distance, and I'm pleased and proud to introduce them. Also, they are being guided by Randy Smith and their teacher Kara Strobel, who taught my kids when they were in school. I encourage them to rise and receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

I also would like to introduce concerned citizens from Consort who have made this trip today to protest the government's neglect of acute care in rural communities. Many in this Assembly may have seen them braving the cold on the front steps of this Assembly in the hope that it would draw some attention to this matter. With that, I'd like to ask them to rise to receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Let me recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the most talented and gifted young Albertans in this province, I would have you know, 75 students from George McDougall high school in Airdrie. As a former Mustang myself I am very, very pleased to have them here in the Assembly today. I'd ask them all to rise. We're going to just introduce their teachers and their parent helpers, which include Mr. Sean Home, Mrs. Tammy Hodgson, and Mrs. Fatima Sarhan. Those are the teachers. Then we have some parents: Mr. Randy Meredith, Mr. Yazdi Bulsara – I'm sorry if I got the name wrong; I did my best there – and Mrs. Amanda Nolan. If we could all give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce four representatives of the northern Alberta and Territories branch of the Kidney Foundation of Canada. Today is World Kidney Day, and the focus is on acute kidney injury and prevention, which is achieved in part, as you know, by maintaining normal blood pressure, consuming less sodium, and taking medications only as prescribed. The statistics are alarming. In northern Alberta alone over 200 Albertans are listed for kidney transplants, and almost 400 are in the workup process. Well over 2 and a half million Canadians have kidney disease, and well over 2,000 Albertans are on dialysis, which is a life-sustaining therapy but not a cure. Doing great work in this realm nonetheless are Tammy Fifield, Sharon Marcus, Ashley Owens, and Flavia Robles. I will ask them now to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today. First, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Jacqueline Schaffter, QC, president and CEO of Legal Aid Alberta; second, Toko Zaza, communications officer for Legal Aid Alberta; third, Lyle Toop, divisional director of human resources and communications with Legal Aid Alberta; and fourth, Donavon Young, ADM, justice service division, who, as you know, is also a native of Regina. These individuals are instrumental in operating effective management of Legal Aid Alberta, ensuring low-income Albertans have continued access to legal services. I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Ms Andrea Burkhart. Ms Burkhart is the executive director of ACT Alberta, the coalition on human trafficking, and an extremely hard-working and dedicated worker. The goal of ACT Alberta is to prevent human trafficking and protect victims through partnership. ACT Alberta works with community agencies, law enforcement, and government to provide assistance to victims, to support the prosecution of traffickers, and to create knowledge and awareness of this issue. At this time I ask my guest to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a special day for me here today because I have three young ladies to introduce who grew up in the riding of Little Bow on a farm in Nobleford, Alberta, of all places. All three grew up to be educators, worked very hard in their community, and were dedicated to giving people more opportunities for success in their lives. All three are related to me. Two are my aunts. My aunt Karen Vos from Victoria; my aunt Joan Stagg, now from Victoria; and my mother, Judy Hehr: all three of them have loved me more than I deserve and have given me much guidance in my life. Would you please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, you have a second intro?

Mr. Denis: Yes, I have a second introduction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a practicum student within my

ministry who is seated in the members' gallery today. Her name is Ana Serban, and she's been working in my ministry since January. She's in the final stretch of her criminology degree at the U of A, and she graduates in June. Ana's area of interest is in human rights and human trafficking, and her future plans include entering the esteemed legal profession. My staff have enjoyed having her with them, and her positive spirit and willingness to jump on any project have been greatly appreciated. I think she's got a bright future ahead of her. Please stand and be introduced.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly my guests from the Alberta Teachers' Association, local 38, Stephani Clements and Heide Doppmeier. Local 38, Calgary public teachers' largest local in western Canada, represents close to 7,000 full- and part-time teachers in the Calgary area and 17 per cent of all of Alberta's teachers. Stephani is the chair of the Political Action Committee and a special-needs teacher, and Heide is one of the two vice-presidents of the local and a high school ESL teacher. I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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 Assembly northern Albertans who are deeply concerned with the premature closure of the life-saving medevac services at the municipal airport. I'd like to introduce them. Please stand as I say your name. Ross Daniels; Roberta Daniels; Randy Bercier; Ruth Isley; Corita Vachon, whose son was saved by air medevac to the downtown airport; and Sean McRae. I'd ask the members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With us today is Brady Whittaker from the Alberta Forest Products Association, which represents so many industries and is such a great industry in northern Alberta and throughout the province. That's lifeblood to our communities. Brady, please stand up and be recognized by the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Michael Androsoff. Mr. Androsoff is a CA who has been working very tirelessly to try to navigate the shoals of ground ambulance service in Lloydminster and in dealing with two provincial governments and two provincial health systems. Trust me; he needs all of his accounting skills to be able to do that. I welcome him here today, and I ask him to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to this Assembly some very bright, young postsecondary students from the U of A. Bashir Mohamed, Andrew Traynor, Juliana Ho, and Michael Vecchio are undergraduate students who have serious concerns

about the impacts that this government's budget cuts will have on the quality and accessibility of postsecondary education in the province. I'd also like to recognize that Bashir Mohamed, a dedicated activist who has worked tirelessly to champion social justice in our community and abroad, has recently won the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal for his humanitarian work in Haiti. I would now ask Bashir, Andrew, Juliana, and Michael to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the 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 two good friends of mine, both individuals who have helped to build our capital region in this great province of Alberta in the business sector: firstly, Mr. Jim Spalding and, secondly, Mr. Wynn Payne, both mentors and good friends. Please welcome them, everybody.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, I believe your guests are here now.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you a couple of very good friends of mine, councillors from Smoky Lake county, Randy Orichowski and Rick Cherniwchan. They're very involved in the seniors' housing foundation out there as well. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Music for Hope Fundraiser

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to relate a good-news story that is happening in my community but that happens all over this wonderful province of Alberta. On Saturday, March 16, the Alberta Cancer Foundation will benefit from the second annual Music for Hope fundraiser, that will be held in Fort Saskatchewan.

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about the benefit of not only that particular event but also the hard-working people who actually spend the time and the energy to make such an event happen. Those people in this case would be Jenn and Isaac McNeill of Fort Saskatchewan. Now, Isaac, of course, is the instigator of all of these wonderful events, and Jenn, his wife, certainly has no choice but to be volun-told. They are typical of many Albertans from across this province who see a need in their community and find a way to meet that need. The fact that this event is sold out indicates the generosity and the compassion of Albertans. The event itself is the second annual event, and each year Isaac will be choosing a new recipient for the fundraising benefits of this particular event.

I along with my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview are looking forward to attending Music for Hope and supporting the Alberta Cancer Foundation in the vital work that they do for cancer patients, survivors, and their families. Each and every year we lose friends, family, and neighbours to cancer. Fortunately for our constituents, Alberta is home to several state-of-the-art cancer treatment facilities staffed with world-class oncologists, doctors, and specialists.

This year we actually have as a guest to this event Bobby Wills, who is the Alberta country music awards male music artist of the year. Being a groupie for wonderful country music, I am looking

forward to attending that event but celebrating it with my community.

Intergenerational Theft

Mr. Hehr: Well, I've said this before, Mr. Speaker, but I believe it bears repeating. Future generations, future children, and grandchildren of this province: call the cops; you have been robbed. You see, I myself and, in fact, all citizens of this province have stolen your inheritance. Now, it's true that we've had an accomplice in this matter, the Progressive Conservative government of this province.

Here's the sad thing, sir. It looks like this intergenerational theft is just getting started. Over the course of the last 25 years this province has taken in and spent all of the \$150 billion in resource revenue we've brought in. This is a windfall of epic proportion that we have chosen to spend on this generation's prosperity, and we have lived well.

However, I come from the school of thought that it is not our God-given right to spend all of this oil wealth as soon as it comes out of the ground. A prudent society and a wise political leadership would convert that resource revenue into another revenue generator. That's what the heritage trust fund was supposed to be.

It became clear to everyone with the release of this budget that this is not what we have done. We are broke, and we have nothing that's been saved. In my view, when charged by future generations with intergenerational theft, we should go before the judge, admit our crime, and say that we are guilty as charged.

The Premier once said, and I'll quote: we need to ensure that our actions are fiscally responsible and fair not only to this generation but to those that follow. This means doing what's right for the long term and not what's in their best interests for the next election cycle.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, this budget does little to address this intergenerational theft that is going on. It is my greatest hope that the political leadership in that party – in fact, in all parties in this Legislature – understand that.

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

Violence against Women and Girls

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I attended the 57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women with my colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Our Canadian delegation was very capably led by federal Minister Rona Ambrose. The goal of this session was to identify ways to eliminate and prevent violence against women and girls.

As a mother of three sons it was particularly reassuring to me that the vast majority of the participants at this UN session recognized the need to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls. In fact, this strategic imperative was concretely advanced by the Canadian delegation.

It's heartening to me to know that this approach is already being applied here in Alberta. What does it look like? Well, the Calgary YWCA hosts the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes campaign, inviting men to walk in high heels to raise awareness of men's roles in combating violence against women. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters hosts Breakfast with the Guys events to bring male leaders together to inform and inspire action to help end domestic violence.

I'm particularly excited about an initiative launched by the B.C. Lions football team, and I'm hoping this will be adopted by the

Calgary Stampeders and the Edmonton Eskimos. Football meets feminism when high-profile athletes stand alongside women as allies. Wally Buono, former coach of the Calgary Stampeders and coach of the B.C. Lions, even steps up to share his own story of growing up in a home with domestic violence.

These initiatives have the potential to be gamechangers. Too often we see gender equality as a women's movement, dependent on male support and encouragement, yet it isn't enough for my father, my husband, and now my sons to stand along the sidelines and root for me. They need to get in this game and participate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will continue with Edmonton-Ellerslie, Drumheller-Stettler, and Lesser Slave Slake after question period.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a brief reminder, please, to try and continue the practice of either curtailing or not using any preambles whatsoever to your supplementals so that we can allow the first five spots that privilege as leaders or people designated by their leaders to take their spot.

Let us begin, then, with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Criminal Justice System

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government's steady abandonment of its former conservative principles is now complete with its embracing of an extreme soft-on-crime, left-wing, lovey-dovey approach to lawbreakers. We know Alberta will be offering two freebie crimes now. One radio commentator today even called this the Alberta criminal advantage. The Premier claims they didn't cut any police or prosecutors in this back-in-debt budget. That's fine, but what about the effect that two free crimes is going to have on Alberta's communities?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, nothing that this member has stated is true in her last exchange, but it's rather shocking that in a statement proposing a tough-on-crime party – I really remembered that her party has talked about less enforcement on highway 63. She called for sheriffs to stop enforcing distracted driving laws, she voted against harsher penalties for impaired drivers, and this leader herself has called upon city council to set up a red-light district. Which way is up?

Ms Smith: I kind of expect distortions and lies from that member. [interjections]

There is also the soft-on-crime . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I could stand here and freeze everything for a while. I'd rather not. Let us remember decorum. Let us remember civility. Let us remember proprieties. Let us be very careful about any motives we might be avowing in either way.

Hon. leader, please proceed.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's also the soft-on-crime approach to ankle monitoring. The Premier said yesterday that "if we don't have the ability to ensure that we can locate people, secure people, and the police can connect to them, then they're not going to be let out of jail." Well, how is she planning to find out if we have that ability? Will she be experimenting in our communities by not monitoring criminals to see if that is as effective as monitoring criminals?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, these are ridiculous comments. We have a justice system that ensures that people stay in jail if they're supposed to. We also have a set of laws that allow judges in certain circumstances, if people can be tracked, to allow them not to be in jail. If we can't track them, I'm pretty sure the judges aren't going to let them out of jail.

Ms Smith: Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. We've got a Justice minister that says that law enforcement can monitor the criminals even without ankle bracelets, and the Premier says that they'll figure it out somehow, and if it doesn't work, then they'll leave them in jail. But they're out of jail now and they're being monitored electronically, so somebody over there doesn't really understand what is going on. Which is it?

Ms Redford: These are ridiculous suggestions. There is an ankle bracelet monitoring program that's been in place, and as long as that's in place, we have the ability to track people. If that program is not in place and it is not possible to track people, then they will not be out of jail. To suggest that there are people right now that are on the streets that shouldn't be on the streets is an insult to the justice system. It's an insult to judges, to the police, to prosecutors, and it's ridiculous, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, you rose on a point of order? Okay. Thank you.

Hon. leader. Second main set of questions.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can easily see why Albertans don't trust this Premier and her government. The Premier said in a year-end interview in 2011 – and I will quote – that Albertans' real fear is that we are going to incur debt. Well, that fear is real. We are going to incur debt, lots of it. Budget 2013, the back-in-debt budget, shows \$17 billion in debt by 2013. So everyone who voted in the last election gets \$13,123.55 worth of debt for their troubles by the time of the next election. Doesn't the Premier realize that she's doing exactly what Albertans feared?

Ms Redford: In fact, Mr. Speaker, by the end of this fiscal year what Albertans will be getting are new schools, new hospitals, and new roads. To invest in infrastructure, which this party has said that they will not do although they have a list of what they'd like to build but no way to pay for it, we have to look to alternative models. I'd like to use an example of a wonderful announcement today with respect to the southeast LRT in Edmonton supported by P3 Canada. I wondered if the Leader of the Opposition was going to send a firmly worded letter to the Prime Minister saying that she doesn't agree with his approach either.

Ms Smith: We'd build it without debt.

The Premier recites her talking points about building Alberta and helping communities, but it is a position that is built on debt and borrowing. It is not built on financial management and prudent planning. Doesn't the Premier care that Alberta's per person deficit is higher than the deficit that is being run by the big-government tax-and-spend Liberals in Ontario?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been struggling to understand why the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition doesn't understand the financial statements that we've prepared. I presented to this House the fact that, well, they don't prepare financial statements. Then I read her speech the other day where her financial advisers are Graham Thomson, Don Braid: all

journalists. Our advisers are people like Scotiabank: "with the weight of new legislation, the Fiscal Management Act, the government is putting in place a revised set of fiscal rules to limit the negative consequences." The Bank of Montreal: "the Province will remain in a positive net financial" situation.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, I was merely pointing out how their budget had been universally panned by virtually everyone.

Here's the picture, Mr. Speaker. The per person deficit in Alberta is \$1,700. The per person deficit in Ontario is \$1,280. This Premier's management of Alberta's finances is a disaster. Is that what she meant when said she wanted to change the character of Alberta?

Ms Redford: The wonderful thing about being the opposition is that they can stand up, make bland statements, and pick and choose. There is no doubt that the budget plan we've set forward, with an operating plan, a capital plan, and a savings plan to put money into the heritage fund, shows Albertans what the fiscal picture is. One of the things that the hon. leader regrets or forgets to say – no motivation intended, Mr. Speaker – is that the reason we're able to deal with the fact that there are challenges to the operational side is that we have a sustainability fund, and it is not a deficit or a debt incurred for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader, for your third main question.

Ms Smith: Page 141, \$17 billion worth of debt by 2016.

Provincial Budget

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister avoids answering questions about his budget. He'd rather criticize our Wildrose recovery plan. He'd rather criticize our 10-year debt-free capital plan than defend his own plan. Yesterday the minister avoided my question on paying back the debt with a patronizing explanation of how the principal isn't due until the term of the loan expires. That's exactly the point. There will soon be \$17 billion worth of debt, but it will take more than 80 years to save enough to pay it off when it comes due at the rate that they're planning on. How can anyone believe it will ever . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: I am so glad that the hon. leader took the time to show Albertans their 10-year debt-free capital plan. [interjections] Absolutely. Because, Mr. Speaker, the reason it is a debt-free capital plan is that they're not going to build anything. We have set out a plan to invest in families and communities. We've been honest with Albertans about how we're going to pay for it and how we're going pay it back. That's something a Progressive Conservative government is very proud of.

2:00

Ms Smith: I don't know where the Premier shops, but \$50 billion is a lot of money.

At the next election the total debt will be \$17 billion, but the total amount set aside will only be \$357 million. The plan for the remaining \$16.6 billion consists of lofty projections, fervent hopes, wishful thinking, and talking-point dreams. We just don't believe any of it. Why should we?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not an opportunity to shout

or try to outshout others. Please, I know Thursday is spelled differently than Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, but some decorum has to be maintained here. It's my job to do that, and you're not helping me, some of you. So, please, this is not a question of showing by shouting how much you love your leader. We understand everybody loves their leaders. Let's leave it at that, and let's carry on.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Provincial Budget (continued)

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Obviously, they didn't hear you.

The Speaker: I've recognized the Minister of Finance for his answer. Surely we're going to allow him the courtesy to give it, please.

All right. Hon. minister, please proceed in silence. Others are just waiting with bated breath to hear your words.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the courtesy. She asked why they should believe that this budget is true, that it has financial relevance, I would say. Well, I don't actually use journalists as my financial advisers. I use people who actually understand how to read a financial statement like the Scotiabank, who believes that what we're doing is on the right track; like the Bank of Montreal Capital Markets, who believe we're on the right track; like the National Bank of Canada, who actually said in their material: "The advantage of the new fiscal framework is that it allows a more valid comparison of the fiscal situation."

The Speaker: I believe you have one final sup, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking about paying back the \$17 billion worth of debt. This is kind of like the guy who's spending thousands of dollars on his line of credit every day who puts his pocket change into a jar every night and expects that in a few years there's going to be enough money there to pay back the line of credit. Their plan is fiction. Why won't the Finance minister admit it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the very reason why they were able to, well, mislead Albertans about what the \$17 billion is all about is because they didn't tell Albertans that while we're working on the \$17 billion capital market plan, we're also building \$26 billion worth of assets for Albertans. That's something they neglect to mention. The other thing they neglect to mention is that what we're doing on the capital markets is not a mortgage like you would get from a bank for your house. These are capital markets, where you purchase bonds on outgoing maturities. We've planned out those maturities. This bond issue is planned. The plan will be reported on every quarter. They should actually learn how to do finances.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Student enrolment across this province is expected to increase by 11,000 next year, but our school boards will be receiving \$48 million less. In southwest Edmonton two public schools recently informed Catholic students who are currently enrolled that they cannot return next year. To the Minister of Education: is this the state of our education

system, where our public schools have to reject students due to a lack of space?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, one thing I would correct is that the Education operational budget is actually going up by \$41 million next year. But there's no question that with the enrolment and with great increases, that creates an incredible amount of pressure on our school boards to keep up. We absolutely have communities like the one he's referring to in southwest Edmonton where we don't have enough space for the children that need to go to the schools in those communities. That's one of the reasons that I'm very confident to be on this side of the House. We've elected the right Premier. We're going to invest in communities and we're going to invest in families and we're going to build Alberta so that those kids will have a school desk in the coming year.

Mr. Hehr: Well, it's a nice answer but complete fiction, Mr. Speaker.

Given that there are 450 fewer teachers from three years ago and given that we'll be losing another 400 on April 1 due to the elimination of AISI, by my math that's 850 fewer teachers. Does this sound like a sustainable education system for our children, or does the minister believe that school buildings, not teachers, educate our youth?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a great point, and that's why with this difficult budget we took every possible step we could to make sure that the limited resources we have are going into the classroom. Teachers on the ground told us: if you can invest anywhere, invest in small class size initiatives. We increased the funding for that. They said: if you're going to invest in anything, invest in inclusion, resources for those special-needs kids. We increased the funding for that. We made sure that every new kid coming into the system is going to be funded next year, but that means that there are going to be pressures on other pieces like maintenance, like AISI, other things that we had to scale back, unfortunately.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't meet the smell test. I'd ask the minister: are you really saying that ESL students in Calgary public are going to be supported like they were in the last budget?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, every new ESL student coming into the system next year will be funded. Absolutely.

Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this budget is an attack on Alberta's seniors. During the election the Premier promised to support seniors and improve their quality of life. Little did they know her empty words would empty their bank accounts. By eliminating property tax assistance in 2014, this Premier effectively hikes property tax for Alberta's seniors or they can pass debt along to their children with a conveniently provided deferral program. My question is to the Premier. Is the property tax assistance program to keep seniors in their own homes just another crutch that the Premier wants to get rid of?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's true that the education property tax program will end in the next year and that for high-income seniors, over \$63,700, that program will no longer exist. I think it was about an average of \$160 that was the grant given back to all senior homeowners. The opportunity that we have in front of us with this budget is the opportunity to defer part or all of

your property taxes, and up to \$2,000 would be the average, \$2,000 versus a grant of \$160.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. It'll be picked up by the kids, Mr. Speaker.

Higher property taxes mean more seniors will be forced out of their homes sooner. Not only is this hard on seniors and their families, but it can't help but increase long-run costs to the government as well for housing and health care. Will the Premier explain how she can think that the solution to this province's revenue problem lies with taxing fixed-income Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again a simplistic suggestion from the opposition. There is no doubt, as our Associate Minister of Seniors has said, that this was a tough choice to make – and I'll tell you that it certainly does impact people in my constituency as well – but there's no doubt that as we move ahead, the decision that we have made is going to ensure that more seniors have more money in their pocket to be able to continue to live in their homes and to continue to live their lives with dignity.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the flat tax supported by the Progressive Conservatives and the Wildrose is causing much of the problem with Alberta's services, causing them to flatline, and given that the Premier's record of broken promises now includes cutting seniors' benefits, slashing their drug coverage, and hiking taxes on the very people who've already paid their share to build this province, will the Premier admit that forcing seniors to pay more taxes is both unnecessary and unfair?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, our minister responsible for seniors has been an advocate for seniors for many years. He's worked very hard on the seniors' property tax deferral program, and we were very proud to be able to include that in 2013 because that is going to affect seniors across this province who've asked us for the flexibility to be able to make choices with respect to their lives, and that's exactly what we've delivered.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

(continued)

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I think I know why the Justice minister and former Liberal staffer doesn't want to prosecute first- and second-time offenders anymore. I was just reading the Fiscal Responsibility Act where it states: "Actual expense for a fiscal year shall not exceed actual revenue for that year plus any amounts allocated from the Alberta Sustainability Fund." That's got to make the Finance minister a little uncomfortable because his back-in-debt budget does not comply with this law and will borrow 3 and a half billion dollars this year to make up the difference. To the Finance minister: how can Albertans trust a government that breaks the law?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong and once again misleading Albertans with statements like that. The hon. member takes a document like this and tells us that he's going to build \$4 billion worth of construction assets and then says: where's your list? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has

produced a list of \$5 billion worth of assets we're going to build. What is it you're not going to build? What school are you not going to build? What hospital are you not going to build? What road are you not going to build? We did not break any laws with this budget. In fact, we complied with all the laws, including some accounting standards that you might want to pick up on.

Mr. Anderson: It's www.wildrose.ca for those of you at home.

Mr. Speaker, given that just a few months ago I asked the Finance minister in question period if he was going to run a deficit in that year and given that the Finance minister stood up and answered, "It is against the law for the government of Alberta to run an operating deficit," and given the operating deficit for last year turned out to be \$1.4 billion and that for next year it's going to be \$450 million, Finance Minister, are you willing to admit that last year's and this year's operating budget deficits were in fact, to use your own words, against the law?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the definition of the operating deficit plus the sustainability fund is the same that's in the current act in front of this House. It would be the operating revenue less the operating expense plus whatever is in the balance of either the sustainability account, now the contingency account. The hon. member, I was told, was trained as a lawyer. I'm not sure he ever practised, but I was told he was trained as one. Perhaps he could reach back into his memory and actually read what is in the law and figure it out for himself. The Auditor General has already ruled on this.

Mr. Anderson: Such vast accounting experience on that side of the room there.

Given that your government has broken the current law twice in two years on this issue and given that you are now attempting to replace the current law with a new law, Bill 12, so you can take what is now illegal and turn it into something that is legal, Minister, how can Albertans trust you to follow your new law when you just finished breaking and discarding the old one as soon as it interfered with your big spending and borrowing plans? Aren't you just going to change the law again next time?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the legislation with respect to fiscal management is consistent in this province, and it has been. It is entirely inappropriate for the – and I use the word lightly – hon. member to make such allegations against an individual who has stood up and been honest with Albertans about our fiscal framework, our fiscal circumstances, and the good, solid, although tough, decisions that we've had to make to ensure that we have a zero increase in spending in this budget, that we're investing in the heritage fund, and that we're living within our means.

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

Legal Aid

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the decision of this government to prioritize funding to ensure fiscal restraint in Budget 2013 was in line with the needs of a very demanding justice system. It's crucial that everyday Albertans have access and representation in the legal system when they need it. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Given the difficult choices made in Budget 2013 please tell us why funding to Legal Aid is a priority for the government.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A healthy justice system includes many different aspects, all of which must be supported by a government, and it includes Legal Aid. This year in our department we had a \$7 million surplus – we're doing more with less – and that \$7 million, I'm pleased to say, will be going to the Legal Aid operating fund to increase access to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how does providing funding to Legal Aid fit with our government's tough-on-crime agenda? [interjections]

Mr. Denis: The other thing they have to look at is to stop charging people with things that aren't dangerous, that clog our system: well, Mr. Speaker, that actually is not my quote; that's a quote from the Member for Airdrie. [interjections] Despite what this member would want us to do, we are going to continue prosecuting offenders despite what this member's advice was.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Come on, now, hon. members: Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Fish Creek. [interjections] Chatting across the bow in the middle of someone asking a question or, for that matter, while I'm speaking is not in keeping with the tradition of the House, when we're trying to maintain some decorum. I understand that it's Thursday afternoon and everybody is anxious to go back to work in their constituencies. I understand that, but let's not get too overly anxious about it, please.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, let's try and hear your next question, again with no preamble, which I want to congratulate you on for the first one.

Legal Aid (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I will try. My final question to the same minister: how will increased funding to legal aid increase access to the justice system?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I could probably give a university lecture to that effect. Increasing funding to legal aid helps in many different ways. It helps people who can least afford the system. Everyone is entitled to a defence regardless of whether or not they can afford a lawyer. We have actually increased the funding for legal aid since 2005 by 90 per cent, and I hope that the federal government will follow our lead in this respect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St Paul-Two Hills, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Criminal Justice System (continued)

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's soft-on-crime agenda continues to come to light. The Justice minister, a former Liberal staffer, is now willing to give offenders not just one but two free passes to commit crimes against hard-working Alberta families and businesses. The Wildrose believes in prosecuting criminals and not letting them get off scot-free. The Justice minister's new hug-a-thug policy is worse than a revolving

door. They won't even be behind bars in the first place. To the Justice minister: why haven't you already reversed course on this progressive crime agenda that will allow criminals to escape the law?

Mr. Denis: That's a very easy question to answer, Mr. Speaker. You can't reverse a course when you didn't start on that course in the first place, and this member knows it very well. This member, however, wants to go on another course. He's called for less enforcement on highway 63, fewer sheriffs to enforce drunk-driving laws. He voted against harsher penalties and campaigned against our crackdown on drunk drivers. Which way is up to this member?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the freebie crime policy isn't the only new progressive justice policy the minister is now pursuing and that the government is also going to stop electronic monitoring of some of this society's most vile criminals, why is the Justice minister abdicating his responsibility to punish and keep track of criminals and put victims of crime first?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this government continues to put victims of crime first. It was our own legislation that started a civil forfeiture office, which takes money out of the hands of organized crime and puts it to good use. I would suggest further that this member really needs to look carefully, use his good legal mind that I know he had as a criminal defence lawyer, and look towards where the facts are because they're certainly not in his answers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister, a former Liberal staffer: I'd just like to know what kind of message you think you are sending to the families and businesses in this province by giving vandals and thieves free passes and allowing violent criminals to roam the streets with no way of tracking them.

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, this member knows or should know that the tracking program never has been for serious or dangerous offenders. We want those people to go to jail. I have no idea why this member wants vandals and thieves on the streets with this monitoring. Ridiculous.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Farm Fuel Distribution Allowance

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the main concerns with Budget 2013 for farmers in my constituency is the recently eliminated farm fuel distribution allowance, which provided a benefit of 6 cents per litre on diesel fuel. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: why was the farm fuel distribution allowance eliminated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. It is true that we did have to make a change in terms of the allowance, but I want to stress that what is left after removal of the allowance is still the best program in the country, the best exemption in the country, a 9-cent exemption.

We were the only province that actually had a rebate over and above the exemption, so I feel very comfortable with this change.

Also, I'd just point out that it is an eligible expense in the ag stability program, so the loss of it can be somewhat mitigated by that.

Ms Kubinec: My second question is to the same minister. I'm thankful that you brought up the ag stability program. In order to participate in the federal-provincial ag stability program, many farmers, including myself, are spending about \$2,300 per year on dues. I would like to know the benefit that we would see by spending upfront money when crop insurance may likely preclude us from ever collecting through this program.

2:20

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, ag stability and crop insurance are not the same thing. In fact, ag stability is broader. It covers more risks, more perils, things like input expenses, loss in storage, market disturbances, that type of thing. So it's prudent to protect oneself and to mitigate one's risk by subscribing to the ag stability program, which is a voluntary program. We also are developing additional insurance options as well, so people can protect themselves that way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: given your explanation, shouldn't all producers who want to participate in ag stability carry insurance as a matter of course?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a topic of some considerable discussion, and right now the ag stability program is a voluntary program. We do have mechanisms in place, though, to prevent people being paid twice. For example, the ag recovery program and the ag stability program have mechanisms within the assessment parts of those programs to prevent that. We think that people should be protecting themselves by buying insurance, so a deeming provision is really quite reasonable, I think, so that there isn't that kind of a double payment.

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

Carbon Tax

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. More than anything an increase in the carbon levy would convince outsiders of Alberta's commitment to cut carbon emissions. Now, prominent conventional oil and oil sands companies have been factoring a carbon levy into their business planning, so they are ready. My question is to the Minister of Finance. How long will the government continue to hide behind the ruse that a levy based on increased intensity of emissions convinces anyone that we are serious about climate change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member meant the minister of environment, not Finance, so I'll take the question. We in Alberta were the first, as this hon. member knows, to put a price on carbon, at \$15 per tonne. To date we have collected over \$300 million. We are reducing emissions. We know as well that we are growing this economy and supplying oil to the world, so it's important, that emission intensity, but it's also important for us to make sure that we're reducing the emissions

that we are. We're committed to that, and we're committed to looking at our climate change policy as well.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Well, if you prefer, the next question is to the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. Given that Alberta's \$15 levy on increased intensity brought in \$90 million last year, B.C.'s \$15 levy on actual emissions brings in \$1.7 billion, and the Alberta Liberal plan would have brought in \$1.8 billion, does this government have the courage to raise the carbon levy to \$30 per tonne of actual emissions or \$40 per tonne? When do we get to put a price on pollution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, as I said, was the first jurisdiction in North America to actually put a price on carbon and legislate that price to reduce emissions intensity by 12 per cent. This government has been a leader in this and will continue to lead in this. What we want to do is to make sure that we're reducing emissions. Alberta is reducing emissions. We are using our climate fund for green technology, for green jobs, and making sure that we are creating opportunities so that we move off fossil fuels and move to greener technology.

Ms Blakeman: Does this government not understand that the world is moving in the direction of higher carbon levies?

The Premier can take a thousand trips to the U.S. to convince them to buy our oil, but if the powers that be believe that Alberta is part of the problem, we're sunk. Answer that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and our government are committed to reaching our targets for greenhouse gas emission reduction. We have said that. I've said that as minister. The Premier has said that. Our government has said that. I've asked my department to renew our climate change strategy to ensure that we will meet not only our 2020 targets but our 2050 targets. This Premier, myself as minister, our government are committed to doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Summer Temporary Employment Program

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades the STEP program has supported important services by community groups like the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and Bethel Community Church, who were here today. At the same time STEP has provided opportunities for young people to gain valuable work experience in their fields. The elimination of the STEP program will affect families, single mothers, community groups, faith groups, and NGOs and impact all Albertans. Will the Premier apologize for calling the STEP program a crutch?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and I have had many discussions about the STEP program, and she and I both know how valuable it has served Albertans over the 40 years, just about, that it's been in place. But any 40-year-old program needs to be reviewed. [interjections] As this government has done, renewed and reinvented itself and been progressively better every year. As we go through the results-based budgeting process, we're looking at the effectiveness of programs and how we continue to

make sure that programs reach the outcomes that we desire and need for Albertans.

Mr. Bilous: I believe the hon. minister means a 40-year government.

Given that many parents, families, and communities depend on the sports, arts, and literacy programs that will disappear along with STEP and given that the Premier believes that STEP is outdated even though the youth unemployment rate in this province is 8.8 per cent, will the Premier admit that she has made a bad decision?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have to take full credit for that decision. That's in my department. These are all difficult decisions, but you have to look at the outcomes that you're trying to achieve. Are you achieving them in the most effective way? Our youth unemployment rate is actually one of the lowest in the country. There are many opportunities, and there are other job programs for youth both provincially and federally. Our Alberta Works office will be working with youth, as it does with other Albertans, to help find those jobs that are available and going begging in this province at the moment. But on the other side of the equation, we will be working with the not-for-profit organizations to make sure that they have the opportunity in other ways to attract the students they need to learn about careers in the not-for-profit sector.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Short-sighted, hon. minister.

Given that the STEP program employs more than 3,000 young people and given that this program works with more than 2,400 organizations province-wide, will the minister do the right thing and reinstate the STEP program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will do is acknowledge that there are lots of organizations across this province who have been hiring young people and giving them an opportunity to learn about jobs in the not-for-profit sector and in the service sector. What I will say is that we will continue to work through our Alberta Works office and with the other programs available to help make sure that young people have an opportunity to find good jobs during the summer, when they're off school, so that they continue both their schooling and their learning profile in the not-for-profit sector. We will continue to work with the not-for-profit sector to make sure that the important learning opportunity to introduce people to their sector will continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Education Property Tax

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The disappointment that I spoke of yesterday from numerous Alberta communities has been replaced with outrage today over provincial changes to the way the education taxes are collected. In Chestermere a single mother told our mayor at the school drop-off today: I don't know where I'm going to find 400 extra dollars. In Wood Buffalo administration told me today that this tax will mean an additional \$16 million in one year coming from their community. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why are you downloading responsibility for your own fiscal mismanagement to municipalities?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to explain the way the education property tax system works in this province. The province lays out and collects 32 per cent of the education property tax from taxpayers, property owners. We collect that amount from the province of Alberta regardless of how you divvy it out. But 11 municipalities were heavily mitigated by 51 others which paid more taxes than they should have. We sought equity so that everyone pays their fair share. We're still going to mitigate the transition out of the mitigation formula, but this is about a similarly valued house in a similar class paying similar taxes, equity for Albertans.

2:30

Mr. McAllister: I assure you, Minister, that that's not how Albertans are seeing it. Given that you campaigned on a promise not to raise taxes and given that I've heard you yourself say several times that you won't balance the books on the backs of municipalities, can you explain to Albertans and all of us in here, including members that represent communities affected by this, how government reaching into the pockets of families is not a tax increase?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to explain again that it was unjust for 11 municipalities to have their education property tax collection heavily subsidized by 51 other municipalities that made up the difference, homeowners that had to make up the difference and pay more education taxes than they should have. We still collect the same amount of taxes. The changes that some people see are because the value of their home has gone up. That's a good-news story. Albertans' net worth is increasing because this is the best economy in the world to be in right now.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, a tax is a tax is a tax.

I'm going to try something different, though. I believe the minister to be a responsible man. Minister, will you please revisit this issue, or at the very least will you meet and consult with community leaders and find a way to slow down this giant tax increase on those municipalities and phase it in, at least give them some time with it?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I think I've said it twice already now. We are mitigating the loss of the mitigation formula for those municipalities that are having heavy impacts so that it is a slower transition over the next few years as they get rid of it. I'd also like to emphasize that the province of Alberta has not raised the rate of education property taxes. It's all due to assessment. In fact, in this province year after year after year we either hold the line on the rate of taxation or we lower it. It's the equity that causes some places to increase.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Wellness Initiatives

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent report from Stats Canada indicates that Canada has a significant issue with the number of Canadians that are overweight or obese. In Alberta more than half of our adults are considered overweight or obese. To the Associate Minister of Wellness. Compared to the other provinces, I understand that Alberta does not stack up well. How can we possibly turn this around? What is in your quiver, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. member not only for his question here today but for his past, present, and, I'm going to say, future political support for wellness initiatives. He's truly been a champion for wellness. He is correct. Alberta ranks only in the middle amongst the provinces with Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario.

According to this study 52 per cent of Albertans are overweight, and experts agree it is a complex issue. It requires a comprehensive approach. It requires various levels of government, private industry, communities, schools, families, and individuals to all come together. That's exactly what we're addressing through partnerships at each of these levels, Mr. Speaker. We intend on being a leader in wellness so Albertans live longer and enjoy a better quality of life than they do today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Connected to this issue is the achievement of a healthy weight. Why is the province not doing more to assist children in this respect?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you again to the member. We've seen great results, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, from the healthy school community wellness fund. You know, it supports healthy school community projects in 47 of 59 school districts. We've also developed many programs to support the healthy development of children, as the member asked. Ever Active Schools, Healthy U food checker, and the REAL Kids initiatives are just three. On top of that, the healthy school community awards recognize individuals and schools and communities who come together as champions for positive outcomes for youth.

Mr. Speaker, our focus on wellness is about creating healthy habits from the start so that kids have what they need for the rest of their lives and can pass it on to their children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, because many jobs require sitting for ridiculously long hours, causing a myriad of health problems, what are you doing to encourage Albertans to get up and get moving?

Mr. Rodney: Well, it sounds like this member knows of this quite well, and so do all the other members here. So many people across Alberta are working really hard, and they are spending a fair bit of time trying to balance both an active lifestyle and time at work, especially sitting down. We've recognized eight employers very recently. They've made great strides in this regard with health and well-being. It's about the Premier's awards for healthy workplaces.

I encourage all members and all Albertans, as a matter of fact, to visit the Healthy U website: healthyalberta.com. It really is a fabulous one-stop shop on healthy eating and active living. There's a whole lot more: Eat Smart Meet Smart. We want everyone in this province to be a health champion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Medical Services in Consort

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 Alberta Health Services temporarily shut down acute-care beds in the town of Consort due to a lack of physician services. It's 2013, and the people of Consort have been stonewalled for two years when

they've come to Alberta Health Services for updates on this issue. To the Minister of Health: on behalf of the good people of Consort here in the gallery why have you still not supplied them and their neighbours with the medical services they need?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the minister thank you for the question. To the folks that are here visiting: we know this is a difficult time for the community and that the loss of those five acute-care beds in Consort is very important to Small Town, Alberta. I can tell you that the commitment to keep the 15 long-term care beds in that facility remains, and I can also tell you that the commitment from Alberta Health Services remains. They will work with the community to ensure that the great services of Alberta Health Services continue in that community.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, again to the minister. Given that the lack of physician services was the reason listed for the closures in the first place and given that the people of Consort went out and found new doctors, built them homes, and brought them to Consort, I ask the minister: the physicians are in Consort; where are the acute-care beds?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, like I said previously, the issue is that there's a temporary closure. The citizens and the MLA know that very, very well. I understand that there's a recent hiring of a second physician there. I'm hoping that's going help out the situation, but I can't guarantee you that right now. That's the work of Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Strankman: It's beyond me.

To the minister again: since it's been two years since the people of Consort were told that their acute-care beds were being temporarily shut down, will you give the people of Consort a clear timeline of when this government will keep its promise and give them back their beds?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I don't want to mislead anybody. I can't give you a clear timeline of when that decision will be made, but I can guarantee you that Alberta Health Services will work with that community to make sure that the reopening of that facility, when that comes about, will be well advertised, and the people will know that. I do not want to promise anybody something that I cannot deliver.

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

School Overcrowding

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overcrowding in schools continues to be a pervasive issue in my constituency of Edmonton-South West. One case I want to bring to your attention: Johnny Bright school. We have our grade 8 and grade 9 students having to take the bus and leave the only junior high they've ever known, pack up and go to a school some 45 minutes away when just earlier this same year they had to request portables in order to deal with rampant overcrowding. I'm sure that all hon. members would agree that the increased class sizes that result from overcrowding present a severe obstacle to student learning. Could the Minister of Education please indicate why schools that were built just two years ago continue to have insufficient student capacity in southwest Edmonton?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question on the mind of many of this MLA's constituents. I know he's been a great

advocate, and he's had me call his parent council from Johnny Bright just this last week. I want to say that we do the planning for schools like Johnny Bright in conjunction with the local school boards based on projected need. Unfortunately, in this situation the population growth has just outpaced what was expected. The good news is that in Budget 2013 we've recommitted to the 120 projects that the Premier committed to during the election. I would say that we've elected the right Premier because we are going to continue building those schools.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that this drastically impacts the lives of families and given that a number of sisters and brothers are now going to be attending different schools in September, will you be providing any more modular units, portables, or any other options in the short term to address these existing space needs within our schools so that we can minimize the impact on these families in Edmonton-South West?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, in consultation with the Minister of Education and in consultation with all the school boards in Alberta we are working on a plan to put modulars out into the province. The school boards are getting letters as we speak, and the minister has been sharing his plans with the school boards. The letters should be out soon.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again back to the same minister. Given that southwest Edmonton needs new schools desperately and given that we are continuing to increase in population size at an overwhelming pace, why are we continuing to build schools through a P3 model instead of the traditional method of simply giving school boards the money and they can build the schools with their own unique designs?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, we only use P3s when they make sense. Since we started using P3 schools, all projects have been delivered on time and under budget. Using P3s allows us to build a lot more schools in a short period of time, getting a better bang for the taxpayer's dollar. We have saved Alberta taxpayers more than \$245 million since we started building schools with P3s. We also get a 30-year maintenance guarantee with P3s. Flexibility in school design is also addressed using P3s. It's there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements, starting with Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Human Trafficking

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a pervasive issue that impacts families here in Alberta, across Canada, and throughout the world. This issue is human trafficking. Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or the receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force. Individuals who are exploited

through human trafficking are often first subjected to extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of education, inadequate social programs, gender-based inequality, corruption, war and conflict situations, and political unrest in countries of origin. The United Nations has estimated that this illegal activity generates approximately \$32 billion annually for its perpetrators.

Alberta and Ontario have the highest incidence of human trafficking for forced labour right here in Canada. Contrary to popular perception, over 90 per cent of these cases involve domestic rather than international human trafficking. It has been noted that aboriginal women and girls are at particular risk.

In Alberta there are organizations that are currently working to support those who have been affected by human trafficking activities. The Chrysalis Anti-Human Trafficking Network offers free counseling and emergency support services for survivors. Additionally, the Alberta Action Coalition on Human Trafficking also undertakes a variety of activities, including education, advocacy, agency collaboration, and victim assistance, including managing an emergency victims' fund. Organizations such as these are especially vital to addressing this illegal activity.

As well, our government plays an important role in addressing this type of crime and in providing support for victims of human trafficking. The Alberta law enforcement response team and its training unit, the Alberta specialized law enforcement training, provide specific support for victims of human trafficking.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Medical Services in Consort

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of Drumheller-Stettler are in the gallery today as this out-of-touch PC government prefers to support corporate welfare, high salaries, and political insiders with pay raises for themselves instead of supporting acute care in our rural communities. These constituents have come together out of frustration with this government.

Mr. Speaker, on June 30, 2011, the Consort Hospital and Care Centre was notified that their acute-care beds would no longer be available for use. This was caused by a lack of physicians within the community. The community understands this and, with their concern, has worked towards a positive solution. Since then the Consort community has dedicated their efforts, resources, and abilities to securing and employing physicians for the Hospital and Care Centre. The community has worked together with their residents, the hospital staff, and the municipality to ensure that they meet the requirements for Alberta Health Services. The community was told that once they secured physicians, their acute-care beds would be reinstated, and they are looking to this government to keep their promise.

This government says that they care about communities and they want to keep them vibrant, yet when the community comes together to meet all requirements, they leave the town of Consort hanging. How do these communities encourage physicians to come to them when Alberta Health Services and this government continually block all positive efforts? As the MLA for Drumheller-Stettler I implore this government to keep their promise that they made to the citizens of Consort and immediately reinstate these acute-care beds.

Métis Settlements Long-term Agreement

Ms Calahasen: Twenty-three years ago I stood here on this very

same spot, honoured to sponsor two of four pieces of legislation that changed the lives of Métis people in Alberta, the only province to recognize Métis as its citizens. It was a promise made by another Premier to work with settlements to become self-sustaining. It brings me to another promise made and a promise kept, and it's by our Premier Redford. That promise was to negotiate a long-term agreement with Métis settlements so they can continue to become self-sustaining communities like municipalities are. This was done on March 12.

That commitment means that we will work with Métis settlements to close the social and economic gaps that exist between settlement members and other Albertans, create strong and accountable governing bodies, and develop community services that are on par with other Alberta communities. All of these actions are key building blocks to create communities that are self-sufficient. Like all Albertans, people living on Métis settlements want a good education for their children, good employment opportunities, a chance to contribute to and benefit from our strong economy, and safe, healthy communities. The actions laid out in the long-term arrangement will bring these aspirations to reality. Over the next 10 years Métis settlements will move toward a governing model that will closely resemble other local governments, a model that will make it possible for settlements to raise their own revenues to ensure a good quality of life for their members.

Congratulations to Métis elders, communities, the Métis leaders, and a special thanks to the Premier for keeping this promise and to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for his perseverance and leadership on this file. The long-term arrangements signify a new day for the Métis settlements and a brighter and stronger future to come in a strong and prosperous Alberta.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, you have a notice of motion?

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'd like to move that

the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the suspension of medevac flights to Edmonton City Centre Airport on March 15, 2013, and the serious concern that this closure could result in the needless death and disability of Albertans who require emergency medical treatment.

I provided the requisite copies of the notice to the Clerk and ask that it be distributed to the members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: I didn't quite catch the eye of Drumheller-Stettler on a petition that you had. I'll allow you to present it now, assuming it's in order.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The petition that I have here: 944 names, 77 letters of support from taxpayers, and 113 letters of support from businesses. I wish to table this petition, and I have the required copies for the assistants.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. member, just as a reminder, we do have a rule that says

that petitions that are to be presented must have Parliamentary Counsel approval. That's all I was asking. Assuming you sought that, fine. If not, as a new member I would just ask you to explain that you will in the future.

Mr. Strankman: Yes, sir. I was with the understanding that my assistant had achieved that.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you very much.

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have tabled this yesterday at your request, but we got cut off early from being able to finish all of the tablings. This is the list of documents that I referenced in my speech in response to the budget a couple of days ago. These are the names of the journalists that the Finance minister thinks are too thick to understand his budget, columns by Rick Bell, Don Braid . . .

Mr. Horner: Point of order.

Ms Smith: . . . Mark Milke, *Calgary Herald* editorial board, Graham Thomson, Lorne Gunter, Bev Dahlby, and Licia Corbella. Five requisite copies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Did I hear the hon. Minister of Finance rising on a point of order during the tabling?

Mr. Horner: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Noted.

Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few tablings. The first is an article from the *Bonnyville Nouvelle* dated March 12, 2013, entitled Why the Rush to Reroute Medevac Planes? It explains a conversation with a spokesman with STARS, who said that he's unsure if they currently have the capacity at the International Airport.

The next tabling I have is an e-mail dated March 13 from a Lindsay Webb, who's pleading with the government not to close down the air medevac services. The requisite copies.

The next is an e-mail dated March 10 from a Gladys Boisvert, who's the president of the St. Paul health care auxiliary and trustee with the St. Paul & District Hospital Foundation, urging, again, that the government not close down the emergency medevac services at the municipal airport.

The next is a letter, with requisite copies, from a Natasha Downes, who's urging the province not to close down the medevac services at the downtown airport.

Next I have a letter dated March 10, 2013, from a Raymond Germain, who indicates a story where his brother had a very serious traumatic incident and used the air medevac services, and he's urging the province not to close it down.

An e-mail dated March 13, 2013, from a Robert Pionteck from Cold Lake urging the government not to close down the medevac services.

Finally, an e-mail dated March 13 from a Thomas Yaksich from Cold Lake urging the province to not close down the medevac services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have the hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar, and then four more, so let's tighten them up. The time is moving.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege of tabling pursuant to standing orders an estimate schedule for the scheduling of the main estimates following the delivery of the budget. In tabling it, I would just like to say that last year we had nine days to review estimates in committees; this year we have 10 days in committees. Last year we had nine days where committees sat at the same time; this year we have four days where that happens. Last year we started five days after the budget reviewing the estimates; this year we're starting 11 days after the budget to review the estimates. Last year all ministries had three hours; this year seven ministries will be reviewed for six hours and one for five hours. Last year the review of the estimates happened over a period of 28 days; this year over a period of 49 days. Taking the estimates seriously this year.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of one of the many e-mails I received about this PC government's cancellation of the STEP program. Bethel Community Church is one of the countless organizations devastated by this cancellation of this program. Wendy Werkman, the church's administrator, writes that they've been hiring two students every year since 2005 and that many of these students have gone on to become teachers or social workers. The cancellation of the STEP program, which the Premier called a crutch, is yet another example of this government's broken promises to the people of Alberta.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of e-mail submissions that Albertans made to our prebudget tour, which visited seven cities in February. Robert, Chris, Brock, and Jack are some of the Albertans who provided valuable input. For example, Brock Robertson writes, "I'm so old I can remember Peter Lougheed defeating the Socreds on a platform of diversification – why then are the Tories so eager to continue exporting raw non-renewable natural resources rather than refined products?"

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: Hon. members, no editorializing, please. Let's just get the tablings done. We're running against the clock, okay? In the future I will cut you off if you do that.

All right. Let's move on here, please. President of Treasury Board, you will follow Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling, five copies, from Sarah Hoffman, the president of the Cloverdale Community League executive, stating that the executive is disappointed that the STEP grant has been cut and proud of the programs that they used to be able to use that program for and urging the provincial government to reinstate the grant.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. You have a tabling?

Mr. Horner: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies each of

the financial analysis that was done by noted financial analysts from Scotiabank, Bank of Montreal, and the National Bank Financial Group, who all gave our budget a positive response and also looked at the format and recognized that it is the proper format for financial documents to be done in.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. An e-mail from a constituent, Emily Yu, concerned about the reduction of the price of generic drugs and the collapsing of the three tiers into one for dispensing drugs. She believes that the result will be greater cost to the government and taxpayers and higher hospitalization and emergency room admittances, which pharmacists could have prevented if they'd been allowed to give the care.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of Dr. Sherman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, a report dated April 2009 entitled *An Uncertain Future for Seniors* prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; a report dated July 2004 entitled *There are Not Enough Hands: Conditions in Ontario's Long-term Care Facilities* prepared by the Canadian Union of Public Employees; a document dated September 2004 entitled *Nursing Home Profit Status and Quality of Care: Is There Any Evidence of an Association*; and a report dated December 1994 entitled *Do For-Profit and Not-For-Profit Nursing Homes Behave Differently*.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hughes, Minister of Energy, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Mr. Hale on March 11, 2013: for the fiscal year 2012-13, how many oil sands producers paying reduced royalties will reach their payout stage, and what effect will that have on nonrenewable resource revenue; in response to Written Question 20, asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 11, 2013: 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.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have at least two points of order that I'm aware of.

And I think, hon. Minister of Justice, if I have my timing right, you were first.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The citation. Proceed.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Denis: I just rise with reference to rule 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) but also referring to some articles from *Beauchesne's*. The hon. Leader of the Opposition made reference to the word "lie" during one of her questions. Now, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know – I refer you to *Beauchesne's* 489, "Since 1958, it has been ruled unparliamentary to use the following expressions." On page 146 there are citations there from 1959 up until 1973 on how the word "lie" is not to be used. I also look to *Beauchesne's* 492, on page 150 "lies" is also mentioned. I would humbly ask that the hon. member personally just apologize for using that term in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously, some things were said by the hon. Justice minister with regard to, for example, this leader voting on an impaired driving bill, which she wasn't even in the House to vote on, of course, because she wasn't elected at that time, and calling for lower enforcement on highway 63. She has never called for lower enforcement on highway 63. So he was saying things that were very inaccurate. That said, as with all new members, we all have to, you know, review the rules, and "lie" certainly is not a word that should be used, and neither should the Justice minister say things that he knows are not true, so I certainly on her behalf withdraw that remark.

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you. That saves us some time. It's been withdrawn, so that will conclude that matter.

The second point of order. The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order with the citation 23(i), imputing "false or unavowed motives to another Member." When the hon. Member for Airdrie made a false accusation of me breaking the law, I didn't stand up on a point of order even though I probably could have because he was making an allegation that I did something which I did not, directly to the integrity that I have spent my lifetime building.

Mr. Anderson: Well, call a point of order next time.

Mr. Horner: Well, I will next time and possibly even more.

Mr. Speaker, when she was doing her tablings, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition made a comment that I made some comment that somehow suggested the journalists and she were thick. She was tabling what she used in her speech as references of the opinion that she agreed with in terms of the financial statements and presentation. That's entirely false. It's not something that I have imputed at all. What I did say was that we used financial experts to create the budget. We used financial experts in terms of the drafting of the format. The advisers that we used, in terms of how we were going to go about planning out the debt repayments and everything else, are all from the financial community, not from the journalistic community, which the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition seems to be using. So it's not at all that I was inferring that the journalists were thick. Far from it. There are others over there that I might impute that to.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the opposition.

Mr. Anderson: Obviously, we can't call points of order on points of order, but the hon. member clearly was just imputing that folks on the other side of the House are thick, in his words, which, you know, I wouldn't call parliamentary language. I would also note that one could say that you just uttered a threat against me, hon. member, when you said that you were willing to do more than a point of order. I'd be pretty careful about uttering such threats.

Now, with regard to what was said, this hon. member has in this House on multiple occasions, including in his answers when he was referring to those journalists, Mr. Speaker, clearly stated multiple times inferring that those speakers or those journalists as well as this member here clearly did not get it, that we were being ignorant. He's used the word "ignorant" several times. He says

that we haven't read the document. There are many different adjectives that he's used to describe us in this regard.

Obviously, our interpretation is that when he continues to use those words and continues to say that we just don't get it, that if we would just read the documents and if the journalists would just read the documents, maybe they would get it, by imputing in this way, he's clearly saying that we're obviously too silly and dumb to understand it. I don't know how else to take that, but I'm glad that he's clarifying that he didn't call the journalists thick and that he was only calling us thick. I guess that's good. It's unparliamentary, but fair enough.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to join into this? I hope not. Thank you.

You know, I guess nothing should really cease to amaze any of us in this House on occasion because it is where emotion can sometimes reach a very high level. Emotions sometimes give rise to words that we frequently regret having said. I think we had a couple of examples of that today. Just moments ago on a previous point of order we had a comment made about the use of the words "lie" or "lies," we had a retraction and a withdrawal – thank you for that – and now we're talking about motives being avowed one way or the other, threats and words of that nature being used.

I just want to remind you of a couple of things. I say this for the benefit of all, not just the new members but the seasoned members, who know this. On page 444 of *Erskine May* – it's one of several good sources of information for how one ought to conduct oneself – it reads under Personal Allusions and Unparliamentary Expressions:

Allegations against Members

Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Parliamentary language is never more desirable than when a Member is canvassing the opinions and conduct of his opponents in debate.

It goes on on page 445 to talk about unparliamentary language, and it says:

Expressions which are unparliamentary and call for prompt interference include:

- (1) the imputation of false or unavowed motives;
- (2) the misrepresentation of the language of another and the accusation of misrepresentation;
- (3) charges of uttering a deliberate falsehood;
- (4) abusive and insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. The Speaker has said in this connection that whether a word should be regarded as unparliamentary depends on the context in which it is used.

Expressions are still unparliamentary even when based on a quotation from elsewhere.

There's more on that front as well.

Finally, you will remember perhaps that on February 21, 2012, nearly a year ago, the Speaker of the day quoted on parliamentary language the following:

Another authoritative statement is found in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd edition, at page 618.

And he quotes:

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order. A direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of substantive motion for which notice is required.

Now, today being Thursday, we saw ample examples of violations or near violations of that. I would again tell you and ask you to please – please – refrain from the personal attacks. This is supposed to be a place where we meet honourably to discuss, to disagree, to voice our

expression, to advocate for our constituents, and so on, but it is not a place to stand and take personal shots at each other. That is the lowest form of discussion and debate, not only in this House but out in the community and elsewhere. You wouldn't be doing that when discussing things with your friends and rivals outside of here. I'm sure you wouldn't. Why would you do it here?

Let us move on. We have no more points of order, then? That clarifies that matter and concludes it.

Emergency Debate

The Speaker: I think we have an SO 30 to deal with. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Medevac Services

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to propose the following motion under Standing Order 30. As required by Standing Order 30(1), written notice was provided to the Speaker two hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly. A letter has been sent, signed by 104 doctors expressing their concern that ending medevac services to the Edmonton City Centre Airport tomorrow, Friday, will endanger lives. The doctors are deeply concerned and are working to have this closure postponed until their concerns are fully addressed. The doctors are, to quote from their letter, urging the government to delay the March relocation of medevac flights away from the City Centre Airport until a proper plan is developed and implemented that will not result in unavoidable loss of life, increased suffering, and reduced health outcomes.

The motion is as follows:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the suspension of medevac flights to Edmonton City Centre Airport on March 15, 2013, and the serious concern that this closure could result in the needless death and disability of Albertans who require emergency medical treatment.

3:10

The issue meets the conditions laid out in Standing Order 30(7); namely, that this is the first motion proposed for today. This motion refers to a single matter, in this case the province ending medevac services to the Edmonton City Centre Airport. This motion does not revive any discussion held during session. There is no bill or motion relating to this concern, nor is there one likely to be tabled. This motion is not based on a question of privilege, and the discussion does not raise a question that according to the standing orders could be only debated on a motion on notice.

I'd like to address the question of whether there is a genuine emergency requiring immediate and urgent consideration. I think that it is self-evident that this issue meets the requirements. As allowed in the standing orders, I will provide a brief summary of the facts.

The government has announced that they will suspend medevac services to the Edmonton City Centre Airport on March 15, 2013. The relocation of medevac services to the International Airport will double the time it takes to move critically ill patients to the hospitals in Edmonton, making the total transit time from landing the aircraft to getting treatment in hospital 40 to 50 minutes longer in optimal weather conditions. Of course, it would be much, much longer on a day like today.

One hundred and four doctors have signed a letter asking that the province delay this closure so that the issue can be better understood and their concerns can be addressed. According to the doctors, who represent the concerns of thousands of patients in

northern Alberta, this additional time to the hospital may be the difference between life and death. One hundred and four medical doctors, as of today and counting, have stated that the relocation plan on March 15 is flawed and state that the move is "unnecessary, costly, and will have fatal consequences" and that for the critically ill patients from northern Alberta it "will result in needless deaths and disability."

A STARS spokesman has stated in a newspaper that it's too early to know if STARS can fulfill the new role envisioned by AHS and that there is no helicopter or flight crew dedicated to transporting patients between the Edmonton International Airport and hospitals. According to these statements made publicly, STARS will make an average of two flights from its base in Edmonton every day; therefore, STARS would not be available to deliver medevac patients to hospitals during these times.

The government has yet to implement all the recommendations of the Health Quality Council report on medevac or indicate that they will be implemented soon. They have not built the overpass on highway 2, they have yet to dedicate an ambulance lane on the QE II highway, they have not synchronized the traffic lights in Edmonton, and they have not standardized the IV and monitoring equipment between fixed-wing STARS and ground ambulances.

Another recent Health Quality Council report indicated severe problems occurring when the government halted consolidation of EMS dispatch. It would be prudent to make sure every possible step is taken to ensure the same thing doesn't happen here.

The plan to add a new holding area to the Edmonton International Airport does nothing to improve patient care since patients will have already been diagnosed by sending doctors. They will not be aided by this facility.

The Edmonton City Centre Airport will continue to operate past the March 15 deadline. It is completely reasonable to propose a suspension of the relocation of medevac as the airport is capable and willing to continue accepting medevac flights while it continues to operate.

Given these circumstances, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this matter is, according to section 389 of *Beauchesne's*, "so pressing that the public interest will suffer it is not given immediate attention." The closure is scheduled for tomorrow, so it cannot be said that there will be another opportunity for us to address it. There will not be. This matter is not being considered by a court of law. There is no other recourse or avenue of appeal for the people of northern Alberta who are now concerned that their access to emergency services is being compromised other than the appeal to this Legislature. Furthermore, delivering emergency medical services is one of the most important things this provincial government does.

Given the facts presented here today, I believe it is in the interests of all of Alberta for this Legislature to permit a respectful debate on the postponing of the relocation of medevac services. When over 104 Alberta doctors are saying that lives are on the line, opening this topic for discussion is the least we can do. This is an imminent decision, and postponing this closure is literally a matter of life and death.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that you rule in favour of this motion so that all members have a chance to speak on this significant issue, to listen to the arguments being presented, and to consider the consequences of the closure on the province and the people of northern Alberta before it is too late. Let me put it to you this way. If you or one of your family members or any member of this Assembly had family members in the north and needed timely emergency care where minutes mattered, would adding 40 or 50 minutes bother you? If a tragedy happened, would you not hope and wish that you had at least provided this

Legislature the opportunity to fully debate the issue to ensure every precaution was taken? Let's not wait until a tragedy happens to change course. Let's not regret not having this important debate.

Thank you for your consideration, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Standing Order 30 Motions

The Speaker: Hon. members, SO 30s are perhaps one of the most misunderstood and sometimes misinterpreted aspects of our long-standing parliamentary traditions. The word that is most often not understood is the word "urgency" as it applies to this first part. Just be reminded that this is not at this stage a question of defining the urgency of the particular issue. That's not what this stage is about.

Now, you did refer a couple of times to the urgency of why it has to be raised now. That's really what urgency means in this part of the procedure. Everybody recognizes it's an important issue. I know there are urgencies on both sides. Just for purposes of clarity I let you finish off your comments, but you were well into the debate that you are anticipating, and I think you recognize that. Nonetheless, I let it go.

Let's be warned, though, that in the future when we're arguing for or against urgency, it's only to do with whether or not it has to be done now and whether we should adjourn all other business of the Assembly in order to deal with this matter now because there is no other opportunity or because there is no other vehicle and so on. I think veteran members know that, so let me hear now what the timbre of the House is.

Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Liberal opposition.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know how much I love a good Standing Order 30 debate. I have to say that I wish that I could support my opposition colleagues in calling for this debate, but this particular issue has been alive for some 20 years. While tomorrow is the date that medevac flights into the Edmonton City Centre Airport are to cease and be transferred elsewhere, we've had 20 years to get to this point. As a result, I'm struggling to define this as an urgent debate for today.

Just let me review a few things. Really, as the Speaker said, we're looking for three things: a specific issue, something that is urgent and important, and something that has no other opportunity to get a public airing. I looked through both *Marleau and Montpetit* – actually, the newer version of it is now *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – and *Beauchesne*. M and M is 585, and *Beauchesne* is 387 and 389. Actually, you can go all the way to 398 on emergency debates. One of the things that it says is "no chronic or continuing concern." A 20-year history of something is fairly chronic and continuing.

I note that in *Beauchesne* 387 – I believe that it's urgent only in that the changeover is tomorrow, as I've said, but the issue has been alive since the 1980s. The province has known for 20 years that the medevac and other services would need to move at some point, once the plebiscite had been held by the citizens of Edmonton. I think it is critical and it is a failure of government that they have not addressed this until this date, but a reason for urgent debate it is not. I think that the issue of health care in northern Alberta is not well served by government. I think that is an incredibly important critical issue, but it is not one that would meet the criteria for urgency at this time.

One of the other cautions we're given is that it shouldn't be a highly partisan issue. What I see now is a fight between two different parties about who can score the most love from northern Alberta. But, as I said, I think the real failure is the government's failure to provide outstanding health care services to the people of northern Alberta.

3:20

Certainly, under *Beauchesne* 389 the requirement is that the issue be "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." I would argue, certainly, that the number of recommendations of the 18 that were put forward by the Health Quality Council: the government not implementing those is an absolute failure. But it is not an urgency of public interest. The government has had 20 years to deal with this issue, and they have failed to do so. They will, I'm sure, comment that they have done so in their own way. But 20 years does not make today the most urgent day of those 20 years.

So I regret that I can't support my opposition colleagues because, as I say, I do love an SO 30 debate. But based on what I'm looking at and based on the parliamentary criteria that is before us, this particular Standing Order 30 motion does not meet the criteria of urgency.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very interesting Standing Order 30. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has brought it forward and has argued its urgency on the basis of a changeover from the City Centre Airport, where medevac flights have been coming in for quite a number of years, to the Edmonton International Airport starting officially tomorrow.

I am going to agree with the hon. member that there is some urgency to this debate but not for the reasons that he's raised. This isn't an urgent debate because of the changeover. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has quite rightly said, this changeover has been coming since 1992 when the city of Edmonton held a plebiscite, a plebiscite which was again renewed, I think, in 1995. In July 2008 the city of Edmonton passed a bylaw saying that they were going to close the airport, and in October 2010 they closed the first runway.

The province was impelled at that point in time to plan for an orderly transition, and it did. It got a report from the Health Quality Council to talk about what was needed, and it went ahead to say that we cannot actually wait until the city of Edmonton closes that lane to make plans for the transition. We have to make those plans, and we have to do it in an orderly basis. That's, in fact, what the government has done.

The urgency is not the fact that the transition has happened. The urgency is not the fact that the planes are going to be flying into and out of the International Airport as of tomorrow. That has been a long-term plan, and quite frankly the hon. member opposite or any of the doctors or anybody else who didn't think that that was an appropriate process could have raised those issues at any time. The fact that they've chosen to whip up a motion around this issue at the last minute is actually quite tragic.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the urgency. The urgency is really around having a debate in this House to let the public of Alberta, particularly of northern Alberta, know exactly what the facts are relative to the transition and the planning and exactly what the facts are relative to the fact that their health is actually going to be

handled, with respect to the medevac process, in a leading-edge way; that their lives are not being sacrificed; that, in fact, their lives are being respected and the fact that they live in northern Alberta is being respected; and the fact that because the City Centre Airport is being closed, there needs to be a prudent planning process and a prudent transition process, and that has been carried out. It is urgent that the public of Alberta know and understand that they can have confidence in their health care system notwithstanding the hysteria that the members opposite have been trying to raise and notwithstanding the misinformation that's been going out there.

Mr. Speaker, I would normally not be one to easily suggest that we should postpone the business of the House. In fact, there's some very important business. Appropriations is one of the most important pieces of business we can have. But on this occasion, notwithstanding the timeliness of the debate, which is five years too late, at least – you know, this is a debate which if it was a real question of urgency, should have come up, at a minimum, in October 2010 when the other runway was closed and put us at risk of this runway being closed on a time frame that was not of our choosing or making, one that we had to plan for rather than wait for. That would have been disrespectful, and that would have been a problem for northern Albertans for sure.

So I am hoping that we will have a debate this afternoon, an urgent debate, because it's urgent that the people of northern Alberta understand that as of tomorrow their health care will be just as important and just as well cared for, if not better cared for, than it has been as of today. That's the urgency of the debate. It's not a question of a number of people who have decided to take the last 10 days or 15 days or 20 days to go around and get people concerned about their health, when this process of transition has been happening over a long period of time, that it's been well known by all involved, certainly well known by the doctors that have been referred to, that doctors and others have been consulted in the process, that experts in this area have been consulted in the process. It's important, indeed urgent, that northern Albertans know that good work has been done on this issue and good work will continue to be done on this issue and that their health is not at risk.

It's also important, and I think even urgent, to take some of the emotion out of this debate and have a reasoned debate. We need to take the emotion out of the debate because the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that people do die. The fact that an ambulance is called in any particular circumstance is a situation which is a clear indicator that somebody is at risk – and I'm sure we'll hear about that – but I don't want to be hearing from this opposition or from anyone else that just because somebody died, the plan was flawed. That's not the issue. So I want to put that on the table right now. [interjections] If these individuals want to make every death in this province a failure of the health system, I'm telling you that that is not a reality. [interjections] That is not a reality.

So it is urgent that we put the facts on the table, that we reassure Albertans that this transition has been well handled, that we have leading-edge health care in this province, including medevac services, and that the citizens of northern Alberta who have to medevac to Edmonton will be well treated in this new system, perhaps even better than they were in the old system.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you consider whether we could proceed with an urgent debate this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you know, I just explained that I allowed Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills to go on without interjection. There were no interventions. Surely we can afford the same courtesy to others, even if we disagree with them. Surely we can at least do that.

Now, the custom and tradition is to allow one speaker at this stage from each of the four parties. I'm going to recognize one more, and then I'm going to make a decision.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, please.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the New Democrat caucus. I will keep my comments short. I'm standing to argue in favour of a SO 30, that it meets the three criteria outlined: first, this is the first opportunity to raise this issue; there was and is no other place to discuss it in the agenda; and that it is a matter of urgent public importance.

First of all, starting tomorrow all medical flights from northern Alberta will land at a new hangar at the Edmonton International Airport. These patients would have otherwise been landing at the municipal airport. This represents a significant change in the way in which northern patients coming to Edmonton for care are going to be treated. Therefore, this is the first opportunity to raise this issue because it begins tomorrow. There is no other place in the agenda for this to be discussed. Question period simply is not debate, as you know very well, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to comment briefly that this is of urgent public importance because there is a large concern among Albertans that this move will compromise the quality of care available to northern Albertans. Government chose the International Airport based on the recommendations made by the Health Quality Council of Alberta report. However – and this is the part that I think the hon. minister is failing to recognize – the government has not followed all of the recommendations that are contained in the report, which means that the decision to move the patients to this location may be compromised when considering the quality of care that was expected when the Health Quality Council reported that they were satisfied with the move to the Edmonton International Airport.

The Edmonton municipal airport is not yet closed. Therefore, there may be an opportunity to continue using the Edmonton municipal airport until better arrangements can be made at the International Airport or another northern hospital receives the upgrades necessary to accept northern patients. If the government is going to consider an alternative, then it cannot proceed with its plan to divert all government aircraft to the International Airport tomorrow.

3:30

I think, Mr. Speaker, the matter of urgent concern is that we in this House are trying to prevent future deaths or accidents. I mean, the hon. minister mentioned that deaths happen. Yes, people do die, but if there is a way for this House to prevent future unnecessary deaths from occurring, then I think it is our responsibility to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I have listened very carefully and very attentively to this issue and to the discussion for urgency for the debate to proceed or not. I've listened to one speaker from each of the four parties now as I am bound to do by tradition more than anything else. The issue before us is to adjourn the debate of other matters in the House in order for this discussion to proceed. I am prepared now to make a ruling on this.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has in fact met the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office by providing the required notice at 10:08 this morning. The motion he provided reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a

matter of urgent public importance; namely, the suspension of medevac flights to Edmonton City Centre Airport on March 15, 2013, and the serious concern that this closure could result in the needless death and disability of Albertans who require emergency medical treatment.

Members will recall that there are several relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject. Let me cite a couple of them for you very briefly. In *Beauchesne* under citation 387, where it talks about motions to adjourn the House, it reads:

The Standing Order is clear that the question be specific and must require urgent consideration. It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate . . . But most decisions based on these conditions are bound to be subjective and few clear cut decisions can be made. In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate.

As we have just heard, three of four parties have expressed a wish, which I will come to in a moment.

There's also an interesting citation, or paragraph at least, on page 689 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which reads:

A Member may request leave from the Speaker "to make a motion for the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration". Furthermore, the matter "must relate to a genuine emergency" and, if the request is granted by the Speaker, the House is permitted to debate the topic at an early opportunity, foregoing the usual 48 hours' notice period.

That having been said, I did make some notes of all the people who spoke, and I am of the view, then, that this matter does meet the requirement for such a debate to occur.

Therefore, in announcing that, I'm taking into account that the move of the medevac services to the Edmonton International Airport is occurring tomorrow, I believe, March 15, as was phrased inside the motion. Therefore, I find that there will be no other opportunity for this Assembly to debate this issue, which is of importance to many Albertans, not only those living in the north but many others who are in their family support network or friend support network. As a result, I find it entirely within the realm to advise you that I find it very much in order for this debate to proceed.

Therefore, I shall now put the question forward to you, and I ask you to listen carefully because I'm going to ask you a question about the debate. If even one member objects, then we'll have to have a standing recording of it. That being said, here is your question – because it's really now in your hands; I've made my decision – shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? Those in favour, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no.

Having heard no opposition to the motion, we will now proceed with the debate. Basically, every member will be allowed up to 10 minutes to speak. There is no 29(2)(a) available. We'll go in the same rotation we just had.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, I'll recognize you first. We are now into the debate. We're finished with urgency. You can talk about the urgent issue if you wish. Please proceed, followed by the Liberal opposition, followed by the Government House Leader or a designate, followed by the ND opposition.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. As the Government House Leader said, I think it's very important that we put the

facts on the table, and I think today is a perfect example to do that. We all saw the snow flying out here today, the miserable road conditions, and there are people here from Bonnyville right now. Now, what if on March 16 someone has a heart attack and they need emergency medical care? If it happened today, they could fly directly on a fixed-wing plane to the downtown airport, and then they're 1,300 metres away from the Royal Alex. That's probably 40 to 45 minutes, and then they're right at the downtown Royal Alex.

Now after today, if on March 16 they had a heart attack and needed timely emergency care, they would have to fly all the way to the International Airport. Because of the weather today, STARS helicopters cannot fly when it's snowing like this. It's not like the movies, where helicopters fly in rain and snow. They would have to take ground transportation from the International Airport to the downtown hospital. Think of how much time that would add. An hour, probably. So how is the hon. House leader even indicating that somehow the services are going to be equivalent? It's an impossibility.

In fact, no doctor that I know of has said that the services are going to be better or even equivalent. What has been done is that the Alberta Health Quality Council report has come up with some recommendations to try and reduce the negative impacts of this government's decision, yet they haven't even implemented those recommendations.

Life-saving medical services, Mr. Speaker, connect rural northern Alberta with world-class acute and emergency care in Edmonton, and now it's going to be rerouted from the downtown airport to the far away International Airport. In a timely fashion the government has failed to consult adequately, has steamrolled opposition, and has ignored the advice of doctors, now at 104 doctors and counting, in planning and executing this move.

The Government House Leader was mentioning deaths. This is what the doctors have said. The closure on March 15 "will result in needless deaths and disability." Needless deaths and disability. Yes, deaths happen all the time, but by taking the actions right now, there will be needless deaths. And, yes, Government House Leader, we will have that debate if that occurs.

Mr. Speaker, in optimal weather conditions by closing the downtown airport, we are going to be adding 40 to 50 minutes. That's on an optimal, pristine day where someone can fly to the International Airport and then take a STARS helicopter, provided it's available – because the STARS spokesperson said that they're not sure if they can actually provide the services within the current plan – to a hospital downtown.

Now, the Premier in her robocalls and recorded videos attempted to say that somehow the government has followed all of the recommendations in the Alberta Health Quality Council report. That is not true. It is not true. There are 18 recommendations. They have not built an overpass on highway 2, they have not synchronized the traffic lights in Edmonton, they have not standardized the IV and monitoring equipment between fixed-wing, STARS, and ground ambulances, and they don't have a dedicated lane on the QE II for ambulances. They tout this brand new triage unit at the International Airport as if this is some type of solution for this. It's not going to reduce wait times. It's not going to reduce wait times. You don't have tertiary care at the International Airport.

3:40

That's what the doctors are saying, doctors who know about this. And this isn't one or two doctors. This is 104 doctors – 20 from Grande Prairie, four from Fort McMurray, from Lac La Biche, Provost, Wainwright – all across this province that are

trying to tell you guys this. They have no political agenda. Why would a doctor come out and do this? We know what can happen to them. They're standing up for their patients. It's not easy for them to do this. [interjections] Keep laughing, guys, about this topic. Really funny.

The plan to redevelop the lands . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling

Decorum

The Speaker: I think this is the fifth time I've stood up today to ask you to please not interrupt others. We might not like what they're saying, we may not agree with what they're saying, but they have a right to say it in this Assembly in accordance with the rules, provided they follow parliamentary procedure and everything else. Please. We've already decided and determined, by unanimous consent of the people earlier, that this is a matter that shall proceed. Let us allow it to proceed with the dignity that it deserves.

Hon. member, please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to go through some of the myths. One of the myths that has been provided is that this is a city of Edmonton decision. Right now the plans for redevelopment are for 25 years. Two-thirds of the land can still be developed with LRT and those very important initiatives that the city wants to run, but the medevac lanes can remain open. The airport is not being functionally closed tomorrow. Planes are actually still in fact flying here. You know, there are private planes. Northern B.C. and Northwest Territories are still going to be landing. So why would we not delay the closure until the very last possible minute?

With respect to the city of Edmonton I am very confident – absolutely confident – that the citizens of Edmonton and the Edmonton city council care deeply about the safety and well-being of their northern neighbours. After all, Edmonton is proud of their collaborative position as the gateway to the north. I'm certain that if the provincial government explained the dangers these 104 doctors are saying that this immediate closure will cause, Edmonton would be willing to delay until the province does its job and establishes an actual alternative that will work. There's simply no rush to move this.

People trust their doctors, the men and women who care for them and their families and who live in their communities. The doctors have overwhelmingly opposed the move and have repeatedly pleaded with the government to reconsider. Now there are over 104 doctors, northern doctors, and counting who have stated that the PC government's decision to relocate medevac is flawed and that the move is “unnecessary, costly, and will have fatal consequences” and for the critically ill patients of northern Alberta “will result in needless deaths and disability.” This government has ignored their advice.

This isn't an urban versus rural, a city versus province issue. It's about right versus wrong. I implore the MLAs here, especially the ones from northern Alberta who have their families, their loved ones, their community members there, to stand up and speak out on this issue. It doesn't have to be closed on Friday. It doesn't have to be closed on Friday. Let's not rush this. Let's make sure that all of the recommendations on the Health Quality Council report are implemented. That's the least that we can do for our constituents. A dedicated ambulance lane, an overpass: let's get those things done at a minimum. Let's not close it tomorrow. Let's delay the closure.

A couple of other myths, Mr. Speaker. STARS cannot fly in winter weather conditions like this. I know they're building a helicopter that may have the capacity, but right now there are only two STARS helicopters. That would be the third one. What if those helicopters are being used at another accident?

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we all talk about the growth of the northern area, highways 63 and 881. The chief medical doctor who treats patients in those accidents, Dr. Richard Birkill – if you get into an accident, you're going to wake up looking at the lights in his operating room – said that the closure tomorrow will result in needless death and disability.

There are other myths here. The government has come out saying that there are only five critical patients a month that use these services. That's not right. The chief doctor in Lac La Biche alone said that there are 120 a year. I heard today in Bonnyville that there are a hundred a year. These aren't routine checkups. These are emergencies. If a woman is having complications with her pregnancy or if there is a closed head injury, these are the types of patients that they're sending. If it's not an emergency, they wouldn't be using the fixed-wing plane. They'd be using ground transportation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I implore the hon. members across to stand up, do what's right, and try and delay this closure past Friday. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to proceed in this order: a Wildrose member, followed by a Liberal member, followed by a government member, followed by NDP.

My next spot now is for a Liberal member if anyone wishes to take it up.

If they don't, then we're going to go over to the government side, and we're going to recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to talk about this debate and the apparent urgency of the situation. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, this is a debate that's been going on for 20 years. I know that for the last three it's been an incredibly vigorous and impassioned debate all across the north and here in Edmonton, and I know that city councillors in the city of Edmonton have debated this very vigorously for the last three years.

It's unfortunate that suddenly some people think that this is critically urgent, as though it's never been discussed before, and implore that it should be stopped, Mr. Speaker. This government does not react on a moment's notice to something like that, which is why we have taken a long time, a couple of years, to prepare to move the medevac services, in anticipation that this was going to be inevitable, from the municipal airport to the Edmonton International.

Now, when it began, I do believe it was probably looking at how we could move the medevac services from the Edmonton City Centre Airport to the Edmonton International Airport and get some comparable service, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, some people look at the changes that are made and see it only as a challenge. They say that it can't be done, that it's impossible. There are people on the other side of this House that have said that. There are people all over the province that have concerns because of what some of them have said. But when there are challenges, we on this side of the House view it as an opportunity to find new ways of doing things, which is why we're going to be providing at least as good a service, and in many cases at the Edmonton International Airport the medevac services will be even better.

I know that people who have been opposed to the move sometimes characterize the service that was provided at the Edmonton City Centre Airport as exemplary, second to none, the perfect type of service. But that's incorrect. There have been incredible challenges at the Edmonton City Centre Airport. It's inappropriate to say that when a plane landed with a patient – 1,500 metres, Mr. Speaker, is a kilometre and a half. It is a fair distance when you are driving through the downtown core. To suggest that it's perfect all the time and you will always get in a matter of minutes to any one of the hospitals is inappropriate. Right now, today, I have some of my colleagues who drove in, and it took over an hour and a half to get through the downtown to get to work because of some weather. You combine the high-volume traffic times in the morning or in the evening with inclement weather, and you wind up with hours and hours of delays. So it's not necessarily an ideal situation.

They've neglected the fact, Mr. Speaker, that traditionally when the plane landed, because there was no other hangar available, patients were moved from the plane to the ambulance in the cold. For some health conditions that cold can have a tremendous impact. It's important to have better quality service than that.

There's also the issue, which we saw yesterday if anyone came and did the tour, that at Edmonton City Centre the equipment wasn't always perfect for moving quickly from one vehicle to another, from the plane to the ambulance, Mr. Speaker. You had to move out bits and pieces of equipment all the time, which made the transfer longer. Not an ideal situation.

We also heard from the paramedics themselves yesterday at the International Airport, Mr. Speaker, that the way it operated at the Edmonton City Centre Airport meant that even though there were two paramedics in any of the vehicles, there was only one available for the patient on the plane and in the ambulance to get to the airport. With the new system there'll be three available for every single patient, which is better care.

You know, we've heard stories about situations where there have been incredible technical glitches at the downtown City Centre Airport. We've had circumstances, Mr. Speaker, where the lights have gone out. It has not been the best, most secure system for medevac service for people in the north.

3:50

At the new station, the new solution that we have created out of this adversity, Mr. Speaker, the new opportunities we've found, you would have seen on the tour yesterday that when the plane lands at the Edmonton International Airport and pulls into the hangar, it's right beside STARS, something that we didn't have available at the municipal airport. The equipment is quickly and easily transposed. They did an example, if anybody from the other side of the House had cared to come, that showed moving the patient into the plane, out of the plane, and over into the new chopper that they've got. It was quick. It was seamless. It was incredible to watch, and the paramedics were very proud of having that technology.

We also saw the new helicopter that can fly in inclement weather, Mr. Speaker, which means that when a patient lands, it is only 10 to 12 minutes to get from the International Airport, despite the weather, despite the traffic, regardless of the traffic or the weather, to any one of the hospitals in Edmonton, something that can't be done from the municipal with inclement weather or heavy traffic, which means that the care and service provided to those who are coming in in emergency situations is better than it's ever been.

Now, you know, there are some people who have asserted that we should take over the Edmonton City Centre Airport or keep it

open, Mr. Speaker. I've heard them throw around numbers, that it only costs \$30 million. I asked the mayor yesterday, and he laughed very heartily at that. Again, I asked him, "What do you think it would cost?" He said, "Well, our numbers say about \$2 billion."

I've asked my own department, and they've said that if you don't factor in the cost of lost tax revenue, which could double or triple that number, Mr. Speaker, it's billions of dollars on service that hasn't been the best it could be, service that is even better at the International Airport. People who even ask for us to keep delivering a service at the municipal airport instead of the international are now asking us to spend money on two different sites and keep the one open that's providing less adequate medevac service to people in the north.

When we talk about how much the airport would cost, we have to be very responsible with every single tax dollar that we spend in this province, Mr. Speaker, which is why we're continuing to invest and not presume that everyone in the north has to come in by plane for medevac service to get service in Edmonton. We want to invest in providing those services to people in the north so they don't need medevac. Eighty per cent of the flights that they come in on are regular, routine things. If those services were provided in places like Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, High Prairie, and Whitecourt, then those people wouldn't need to fly in.

The people in the north don't deserve to have billions of taxpayer dollars invested in the City Centre Airport on the premise that it will provide them better care for medevac service, Mr. Speaker, when it obviously doesn't. They deserve the best medevac service and investment in the facilities in their communities so they can stay home and get the good health care that they need. That's the plan that this province has. That's the vision we have going forward, and we will continue to do better, provide them better medevac service, and continue to provide them better health care service in their own communities in the north.

This is the right move. This is fantastic news for rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker. This is the plan we have for investing in the north and making sure that those people, who help contribute significantly to this economy, are treated like Albertans who get the services they need. That's why I'm proud to be part of this government and this team.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to support this motion as brought forward here this afternoon. I have a couple of different arguments that I would like to bring forward in regard to this situation. Also, on a personal level I would like to say that I've been following this situation with the airport for quite a number of years. I live right by the airport myself and was part of the citizens advisory council body when the municipality was considering this change. You know, I can say from my neighbourhood community and from that council that we had some serious reservations about how this whole process was brought forward over time. We were just hoping that we could seek some resolution for the good of our community and for the good of Albertans in general and find something that we can all work with.

I guess our main concern and the reason that Alberta New Democrats are supporting this emergency debate this afternoon is that there are a number of recommendations that the Health Quality Council put forward that have not been met up till this time, till the day before the services are meant to be closed off from the municipal airport and over to the International Airport.

Some of these things that the HQCA put forward that have not been met so far include the following, that

traffic patterns be studied and an optimal ambulance route established from the Edmonton International Airport to tertiary care facilities.

That's to all hospitals that we have here in the Edmonton area. We know that the vagaries of traffic and weather conditions can obstruct the smooth flow of traffic from the airport, and certainly we need to look at this more closely before we move the service from one airport to another.

Another one is that

an evaluation be conducted on the impact of traffic lights on transport times and changes implemented to minimize this impact. Changes could include installing an Optacom device/system to allow ambulances to change . . . lights to green or [perhaps] synchronizing traffic lights on the main routes from the Edmonton International Airport to tertiary care facilities.

Again, we all have experienced the traffic jams that can happen at certain times of the day from the Edmonton International Airport, and I think that we should resolve those issues before moving forward.

Number three:

all ambulances be equipped with a Global Positioning System so alternate routes can be determined when traffic is problematic.

You know, sometimes you have a circumstance, Mr. Speaker, where perhaps an emergency debate or a major change like this can actually benefit all Albertans. Who's to say that the best practice that we come forward with for equipping ambulances shouldn't be a standard that we could execute throughout the province, this GPS recommendation, in particular, I think?

Number four:

additional road infrastructure, such as an on/off ramp from the new facility [at the International Airport] that [could] provide faster access to north-bound Queen Elizabeth II or a dedicated emergency lane . . . be built.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we've all experienced, I'm sure, the bottleneck that occurs at the overpass that feeds the QE II both north and south. I think that this is again an opportunity to address the specific problem but perhaps fix a larger issue that has plagued that airport intersection for many, many years.

As well, Mr. Speaker, my second point that I want to bring forward – and I think this is very important – is that Alberta New Democrats first and foremost support the value of independence and the decision-making bodies of municipal governments. Municipal governments should receive the utmost level of respect for their work as any other level of government in our province. Please be sure to note that I am not rising here today, then, to discuss the decision made by the city of Edmonton to close the City Centre Airport. We have to respect these decisions. It was within the jurisdiction of the city of Edmonton to make this decision, and therefore we must accept that the airport will in fact close sometime in the future, as the city of Edmonton's government so desires.

However, the New Democrats certainly understand and empathize with those Albertans who are frustrated with the way in which the government of Alberta has addressed this issue. As I say, the failure to address the Health Quality Council's standards in a reasonable way is the reason that we certainly believe that we should take a sober second look at what the timing is for the closing and the changeover of this facility. The airplanes will still be landing and taking off at the municipal airport after March 15. I will attest to that since I live right by it. I watch them go up and down every day, and they will keep on doing so after the 15th. Until we meet the standards that have been put forward by the

government and a body that is responsible for health quality in this province, I think it is irresponsible and incorrect to meet this artificial deadline that we would see taking place tomorrow.

I thank you for the opportunity to be speaking on this, and thanks to the member who brought it forward here this afternoon.

4:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm going to announce the speaking list right away, but please know that I have well over 20-some members who wish to speak. We have 30 minutes left, so if you would keep your comments down to something brief, that would be appreciated. It would allow the maximum number of people a chance to speak this afternoon.

I have Calgary-South East, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, I have various experiences in emergency medical services. I want to speak a little bit about those experiences because I think that when we all look at what we want for our families, certainly when I'm training paramedics or when I've been part of the emergency services system, what we want is the best quality. We never want to see anybody die. The reality is that people do die, and they will continue to die. I will not stand here and promise anybody that nobody will die.

I've been in that elevator when we thought everything was going okay, in an apartment building where the elevator barely fits the stretcher, two paramedics, and a patient, talking to the patient one minute and having them crash on you in the next. You know what? The elevator doesn't move any quicker when you're 27 floors up. You can't do effective chest compressions. You can't get your medications in that you want on time. It's a situation that's unfortunate, but I won't stand there and blame the elevator company for the way they designed the elevator or the building. It is what it is, and I'll accept responsibility for that.

The tough thing is having to talk to the other people that couldn't get in the elevator at the bottom of the elevator, who just said goodbye to their family member, and now we're working on them: "I'm sorry. You can't even ride in the front because we've got to go." When they get to the hospital, unfortunately, I've had to give that information to those loved ones that that patient passed away. So the severity of what we're talking about here is not light, and it is not something where politics should be played. It's not something where you hire a group and run them around to scare the hell out of Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when I made a commitment to do no harm, part of that doing no harm is making sure people have accurate information to make informed decisions, to be sure that we're instilling confidence in the systems that we have today, to make sure that we build on our strengths, and not try to rip them down every time there is change.

Now, let's talk about that change for one minute. There is a person who sat in this Legislature in the very front chairs whom I respect immensely – and most Albertans did; we've heard about it over and over again since the budget has been delivered – and that's Mr. Ralph Klein. In the late '90s what the Klein government decided to do was shut down not just one major hospital in downtown Calgary but two. That's where people received emergency care, and he shut those down simply because there was

better economic value in building hospitals in other areas, one being named after our most beloved Premier, and that's the Peter Lougheed that we know today.

What I will tell you is this. When those changes came, there were almost a million people that were terrified for fear of what physicians were saying, particularly those in downtown Calgary worried about access to care, not just care from an emergency perspective in terms of ambulance, but we were also looking at the ability for nurses to provide in-and-out care and specialty care and so on for those who lived in downtown Calgary. But, as we all know, that transition took place. We are providing better care at the Peter Lougheed Centre, the Rockyview. We have just built a state-of-the-art hospital. It's not just mentioned in Calgary but around the world. It's mentioned around the world as being state of the art. That's what we have here, so let's talk about the facts, Mr. Speaker.

What we have here and what we've heard is that the Health Quality Council has come out with a bunch of numbers, and you know what? The time has doubled. Well, has anybody on this side ever done the research in terms of where those times were determined?

As a paramedic I know there's a difference between emergency care and emergency driving and regular traffic for those regular patients. All those times were calculated with people going through regular traffic. But Alberta Health Services, again, went one step further to make sure for those regular-traffic patients. You cannot evaluate the emergency traffic because you can't fire up an ambulance and drive it through downtown Edmonton or anywhere else without a patient in the back. It's against the law. But they ran those times early in the morning, between 7 and 9, in rush hour. They ran them at noon. Then they ran them between 5 and 6, during probably the worst time that a highway ever receives traffic, and those are the times that they came up with.

I was talking to an air medevac flight pilot who's done it for 11 years, and he says that any time we've come into the International Airport – and let's be sure – there were 63 flights, seven of them being red, with no problems at all, Mr. Speaker. The flight pilot calls in. He says: I need priority. He gets the priority that he needs. This is from an experienced person. He has no gain in it. Nothing. In fact, he doesn't even do that anymore. When we taxied on our plane yesterday, it was slightly different. It was three minutes. He said: worst-case scenario, weather being terrible, crosswinds being terrible, it's 10 minutes. That's from somebody who knows.

Now, let me tell you something that I know because I've done it in Calgary for over a decade, picking up medevac patients, equal to or more than the amount of people that are being flown into Edmonton. I've driven to the Foothills in Calgary, which is not a direct line. It is through traffic, and it is almost exactly the same set-up that we have now with this new state-of-the-art facility, with ambulances that have the ability to take the stretcher from the plane right onto the ambulance. In Calgary we don't have that yet. We have to blanket drag them. We do it outside. It's cold for the patients. There's wind. There are planes firing up all over the place. But you know what? There's no incident there because the physicians that start the care in the beginning and the nurses all care. The paramedics and the pilots all care, and they know when it's serious.

Mr. Speaker, what we're being told here in terms of the facts is that we need a lane. A lane would be great. But I can tell you that when I turn the lights on on that ambulance, I've got every lane. We look at some of the stats. I sat in the St. Paul meeting for Save Our Medevac. When I saw those stats for the St. Paul medevac – and you should be aware of this – they put up a picture of an ambulance stuck in traffic without its lights on. How dare they say

that there's a patient in the back of that ambulance dying? That is false. Otherwise, the lights would be on. It would be going right down the right-of-way, the shoulder, that we all saw in there. That's what I know, and you know it.

Mr. Speaker, what we're being told and what these poor northern Albertans are being sold: snake oil. It is not the truth. You know what? I respect the physicians because I talked to those physicians. In fact, 50 physicians were consulted in this process over a year ago. They are highly decorated physicians from emergency rooms, from ICU, from specialized care all over northern Alberta. They all received the letter, but here we are in an emergency debate one day before we're going to move to a state-of-the-art medevac service ability.

What I hear on this other side is: "Rick, you don't know. You're not a doctor." Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? Here's what I can tell you. I'm an advanced-care paramedic. I've been out there in the ditch. I've had to make the decision, the hard decision based on the resources that I've had, to walk away from children that are taking their last breath to deal with the person who has drunk too much and decided to get in their car. You tell me that I don't know? I tell you that if it wasn't for the hard-working paramedics that are on the street and in your community saving lives to get them to these physicians, those patients don't get there.

I'll tell you what. If we're going to evaluate it, let's evaluate the whole thing because not every instance in medical care is black and white. It's often very grey based on the decisions. I look back over my career, and I tell you that there were times when I looked and thought: "Maybe I made a mistake. Maybe I waited too long. Maybe I didn't call in the additional resources." You know what? I can tell you that the caring, adequate, awesome physicians that we have in northern Alberta have the same questions. When we evaluate a call, we evaluate it from the time it comes in to the very minute it ends. That call just doesn't end when we get them to the hospital. It doesn't end in the trauma room there. It doesn't end on the ward. It may end 24 hours, 48 hours later, and we all own the responsibility of the care that we provided.

In fact, the Minister of Municipal Affairs had the meeting with Mayor Mandel yesterday. They are eager to move forward on the development of that airport. What this government has done is that we've gotten out in front of it. We have decided to make a decision, albeit not easy. I can tell you: if I could put an airstrip right next to every single hospital, wouldn't that be great? But is it economically feasible, and do the stats tell you that?

4:10

Let me reiterate the stats for you one more time. Ninety-two per cent of the people that were flown into Edmonton were actually regular traffic. They were nonemergent. They might have been ICU, but they were stable. There is a difference. Mr. Speaker. Here's what we know. In fact, the statistics at the end of the day, those time-critical patients, based on the dispatch information that actually came in – you know where the dispatch information comes from? The very doctors that send the patients. They're the ones talking to other doctors on the other line, the rapid scene, that say: "Hey, I've got this patient. Okay. Let's fire up the bird, and let's get him going." That's where the dispatch information comes from. They send them out. In fact, what Alberta Health Services and the Health Quality Council have done when they have come up with these numbers that give you five time-sensitive patients per month is that they've gone back and re-evaluated because their care has been awesome in flight, but their condition has deteriorated.

Mr. Speaker, I speak with passion, I speak with truth, I always want to be approachable, I always want to be believable, I want to

be credible, and I'll continue to do that because I believe that this is the best possible solution for Albertans. In fact, I think it's going to enhance care. In talking to paramedics that I actually worked with and that I respect from all over this province, that do such a wonderful job, they have not objected.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Peace River.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the previous speaker as well. I understand, having been on the front line, that he's probably seen some pretty harsh incidents, and I understand the passion with which he speaks.

I think there is a solution to this issue. It doesn't need to be black versus white or rural versus urban or Edmonton versus everyone else. The reason we came into this issue – and we're not new to this issue, as it seems to be implied by the hon. Municipal Affairs minister. We took a position on this years ago even though it certainly wasn't very popular with the mayor of Edmonton – he certainly let us know it wasn't popular with him – because we thought it was the right thing to do.

We were very concerned about the issue of service to the north. At the time it was a broader issue, but as we started going forward on this issue, we became increasingly concerned about the issue of providing appropriate medical facilities to those who are in the north and medical care to those who are in the north. We weren't alone in this. I think that the members opposite should remember that it was their former leader, Premier Stelmach, who ordered the Health Quality Council report to look into what needed to be done to be able to ensure that there was seamless access to care for members of the north when the facility and the access to the municipal airport closed down.

That, I think, is the crux of what we're talking about today, whether or not the government, having accepted the recommendations of that Health Quality Council report, accepted that there was some work that needed to be done to ensure seamless care and whether they have completed the work in time for this to close tomorrow. What is the rush in moving towards taking services out of the Edmonton City Centre Airport when there doesn't seem to be an urgent need from the point of view of the city?

Let me talk about a couple of things. Part of the reason why the government, though they don't like us to tell them so, lost credibility when they said, "Trust us; we will fix this, and there will be seamless service" is because we have seen incidents very recently where it hasn't worked. The amalgamation of the AHS superboard has not worked particularly well. We hear all kinds of problems with front-line service delivery – we just got another Health Quality Council report indicating the numerous problems in the amalgamation of EMS – the closure of Carmangay without proper notice, the closure now of Michener without proper notification. The problem is that we have seen again and again and again the government taking decisions and then saying: don't worry; we'll figure it out after the fact. Maybe on certain things you can figure it out after the fact, but on issues of life and death, of critical care, you can't figure it out after the fact. Otherwise, you will have needless death, you will have needless suffering, and that's what we're trying to avoid here.

The issue of the rationale. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Calder saying that planes are going to continue to take off and land after March 15. It seems to us that the very last plane that should take off or land at that airport should be a medevac plane, providing critical care and critical transportation to critically injured patients from northern Alberta. If there are planes still being used in that facility, if there is still an

operational municipal airport, there absolutely is no rush in ending our medevac flights to and from.

I want to address as well – the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright was throwing around some figures about cost, the cost of the airport and how much it would cost for the province to take it on. Now, of course, I had at one point in the past suggested that that might be a solution to this, but one of the things that the doctors are suggesting is to allow the city of Edmonton to continue developing two-thirds of the land and just leave one runway open for as long as possible to be able to continue to allow the flights to go in and out. It seems to me that that is the kind of solution that we're looking for, one that doesn't get in the way of the city of Edmonton's ability to develop the lands but also ensures that we're able to have seamless service for our northern communities until such time as all of the promises the government has made on increasing care in other facilities is met. Because right now, it's not been met.

This may be a 25-year time horizon before the city of Edmonton fully develops these lands. It may be 10 to 15 years before they would need to take this particular runway out of use. So let's make sure that we do this right. Let's continue using this runway, ask the Edmonton mayor to work around his plans for development so that we can continue to provide service to northern Alberta.

At some point maybe in the future the province might be interested in looking at buying that last runway. The numbers that we've been hearing are that it would cost \$114 million to \$166 million. Those numbers are quite a bit different than what the hon. Municipal Affairs minister suggested. It also happens to be kind of in the order of what the Edmonton mayor is looking for for his arena funding project, so there might be a way for them to be able to do a bit of a swap: get the mayor what he wants as well as be able to ensure that we've got seamless access for our northern medevac patients. Just putting it out there.

In the meantime I think we have to be advised and we have to listen to what our professionals are saying, what our doctors are saying. In the report that Premier Stelmach had commissioned, it went through 18 recommendations about what needed to be done to make sure that services to our northern communities were not impacted. It's already been referenced – it's already been talked about by a couple of previous members – the ways in which those recommendations have not been fully implemented. If the government intends to fully implement them, great. Then let's take the time, continue the service at the Edmonton City Centre Airport, and get that interchange fixed, get the additional lane put in on the highway, synchronize the lights, do those things first before you end up interfering with the service. There is no rush to end things tomorrow.

I think the other issue that we have to be mindful of – I think that the members opposite maybe are misreading the statistics, but the statistics that I have seen suggest that this is a very, very serious issue for critically injured patients. It may well be that there are some patients who are transferred into the Edmonton City Centre Airport who are coming down for specialist treatment and appointments and are not of a critical or urgent nature. That may well be the case, and I think it certainly is. But the statistics that we have seen are that we've got 3,059 patients coming in from northern Alberta and then there are an additional 805 patients that are coming in from other northern jurisdictions, other provinces, and 58 per cent of them have been identified by doctors as being code yellow or code red, so they are patients with a high level of acuteness who need immediate care.

The question of whether or not any other air ambulance service would be able to take on these patients: it's simply not the case. STARS has indicated already that they cannot step in and take on

these patients because, first of all, they fly at half the speed that a fixed-wing aircraft does. That's one problem. Second of all, the patient load is just too high. In some cases they're looking at bringing in as many as five patients a day. The total amount that STARS would have to be able to assume is an additional 1,779 critical patients to be able to get them into the hospitals in Edmonton. They simply can't do that.

The other issue is the issue of the triage at the Edmonton International Airport, that northern journalists were flown in to at a cost of \$17,000 to get a tour around. These patients don't need triage. The reason why they are flying into Edmonton is that they have already been triaged. It has already been indicated that they need some serious care that is only available at the Royal Alex or the University of Alberta hospital. That, I think, is the crux of the matter here. The services that are going to be available at the Leduc hospital, the regional hospitals are the same as many of the regional hospitals that these patients are being flown out of.

4:20

Let me just go through this because this is really all about patients and it's all about the kind of care that they are going to receive and it is in keeping, I think, with the government's priorities of trying to ensure that we've got specialty services in our large centres. [interjection] One minute? Oh, darn it. Let me go through it quickly, then.

These are the kinds of things that patients are being flown in for, and they can only get this care from the Royal Alexandra hospital and the University of Alberta hospital. They need to have clot-busting drugs for heart attack patients, and they need to have them within 90 minutes of presenting chest pain. For strokes they need a CT scan and a clot-busting drug and maybe even a neurosurgeon, only available at the Royal Alex or U of A. For major trauma, vehicle collisions, moderate to severe closed head injuries, trauma involving the brain or spinal cord, and hemorrhages that require critical care, interventional radiologists, trauma surgeons, intensive care, again, are only available at the Royal Alex and the U of A. For premature labour and premature birth, issues of neonatal ICU, pediatricians, obstetrics are only available at the Royal Alex and at the University of Alberta hospital.

Let me just close, then, with one quote from Dr. Ruben Hansen. There are a whole range of comments – and I will table this document, Mr. Speaker – but let me just close with Dr. Ruben Hansen, site chief, emergency medicine, Royal Alex hospital.

The closure of the City Centre Airport will significantly increase patient transport times to our . . . facility. This will, without question, negatively impact our ability to provide prompt, necessary medical care to these critical patients. Delays in the provision of life and limb saving interventions in this patient population will have a detrimental effect on long-term outcomes including survival rate and quality of life.

I ask the government to reconsider the closure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River and Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Government House Leader said when he rose in the initial debate, there's lots of misinformation flying around. We have to be careful to focus our debate on facts. I agree with that. Of course, the first fact here is that the City Centre Airport is going to close. That's a decision of the city, not the province. It's a decision that was theirs to make, and as far as I'm concerned, it's theirs to live with.

As a northern Albertan obviously my preference would be to have that airport open, not just for medevac but for business. For

some reason it seems to concern the city not a whit that, for example, the city of Grande Prairie flies more passengers to Calgary now than they do to the city of Edmonton because it's easier to do business with them. Mr. Speaker, I'm frustrated to the extreme by that decision. But it is a decision of the city of Edmonton, and the airport is going to close. There's no question about it.

It's going to close. The date of that is uncertain. We heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs as late as yesterday that the mayor himself couldn't talk about a definitive date. He said that it might take a year. He would prefer that it take a month. We need better certainty than that, and we need to plan. So the City Centre Airport is closing, and we have to examine the best available alternatives. It's just as simple as that. We have to do something else because the airport is closing.

Now, yesterday there was a tour of the new medevac facility at the airport, and it's a fabulous place. You know, it's going to have dedicated ambulances, and you can transfer patients inside. There are staging beds inside, not a triage centre, as the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills indicated. It's a transfer centre which allows the facility to hold noncritical patients so that critical patients can get primary access to the transportation vehicles. It's all better and state of the art. In fact, there actually isn't any facility at the City Centre Airport. They transfer you out on the tarmac even if it's 40 below.

So what's the issue? The facilities are great. The people are great. The issue, of course, is timing. The distance from the Edmonton International Airport to the Royal Alex is a lot longer. Nobody's questioning that. We get that. Even though the Royal Alex receives less than a third of the critical transfers that come to Edmonton – less than a third; that's from the Health Quality Council report – it's longer. We get that.

It is longer, although not as bad, from the Edmonton International to the University hospital, which receives more of our patients. It receives about two-thirds. It's longer than it is from the City Centre Airport to the University hospital. Though, let's stick to facts. The member said that it adds 40 to 50 minutes. I drove there after the conclusion of the ceremony yesterday, doing the speed limit all the way, and went through one albeit small construction zone, also observing the speed limit, Mr. Speaker, and made it in 25 minutes to the University hospital. I was downtown in the underground garage getting out of my car in 30 minutes. So let's stick to facts.

The other thing that the hon. member said was that anybody that's on a plane is an emergency; that's why they're on the plane. Nobody gets medevaced from my constituency to Edmonton in a ground ambulance, Mr. Speaker. They're on a plane. That's what a medevac is. A ground ambulance is an interhospital transfer, a completely different beast. We get medevaced down for MRIs and whatever else.

Yes, some of us are critical. Some of us have broken femurs, for example, which is a time-sensitive condition. You'll get loaded onto an ambulance, and they won't even turn the lights on because you're not going to die in five minutes. If you don't get treatment within 12 hours, you might. That's time-sensitive. But that doesn't mean you have to save five minutes.

Mr. Speaker, the question of time is indeed critical, and we have to determine how critical it is. If it is critical, what can you do to mitigate? We don't have the option of using the City Centre Airport. What's the best available option? We think we've chosen that.

Everybody talks about the importance of time, Mr. Speaker, at the front end of this. It's true. We have the golden hour. In my constituency you won't even make your home hospital in the

golden hour, which is why we have CAT scan machines in High Level, in Peace River, in Grande Prairie, in Fort McMurray to mitigate that time. That's when you meet the golden hour, not when you load and get to Edmonton.

You won't get to Edmonton within hours of your injury because a doctor back there has to decide you're going to be medevaced. He has to find a bed. They arrange the plane. You have to get taken by ambulance to the airport there. You fly here. You get transferred to the hospital here. You're in the system for hours, and when you get here, everybody in the system – the dispatchers, the air medevac, the ground ambulance, and the receiving hospital – knows you're coming. Mr. Speaker, they can juggle the time and make sure it works.

The question is: if helicopters are part of the system and they can't fly, Mr. Speaker, what do we do? Well, sometimes the fixed wings can't fly. You pick the next best alternative. Our alternative airport is Calgary. Their alternative airport is Edmonton. What happens if you can't fly and the helicopter can't fly? You might get transferred to Calgary, which is interesting. The time from the Calgary airport to the hospital is the same as the time from the Edmonton airport to the University hospital. Do they have a higher death rate on their medevacs? No. In fact, what do you think happens when you get medevaced to downtown Vancouver and you need to access the critical burn unit at the Vancouver General hospital? It's probably twice the distance.

Mr. Speaker, all you can do is pick the best available alternative and put plans in place to mitigate. We've got a state-of-the-art facility out there. We transfer patients by helicopter when we can. If the helicopter can't fly, then we've got to figure out what the alternative is, and we work that in, the same as the case is today with the City Centre Airport when the fixed wings can't fly.

Mr. Speaker, you've got to pick the best available alternative. This is not a political discussion any more than debating in here what scalpel a physician should use when they're doing heart surgery. That's none of our business. We should leave that to experts, which is what we've done. What a great, great political

discussion would be: should we keep the City Centre Airport open? Unfortunately – although, as a northern Albertan that would be my preference – we're standing in the wrong Chamber to have that debate, but it would be a great debate to have.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about the level of political debate in this House and the role of the opposition. Their role is not to oppose; it's to improve. But we seem to conduct opposition lately by identifying a bogeyman and, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre described, flash up the Chicken Little tour, as she worded it – she's a seasoned practitioner herself – and find a busy intersection to stand in. That's not adding to the value of political debate in our province. It's dishonest. It misinforms people.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have to find the best available alternative. We think we've done it. If anybody has got a better one, table it. But the City Centre Airport is going to close, and it is not amongst the options we can choose from.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've reached 4:30, and as you know, our Standing Order 4(2) requires us to adjourn. But before we do, I want to thank the members for their input this afternoon and then also express my regret that we didn't get to the entire list. So let your constituents know that you were on the list to speak. In particular, I have Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Lesser Slave Lake, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Grande Prairie-Smoky, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, Calgary-Fish Creek, and several others who had wanted to speak, including the Minister of Education and a few others that are from the north in particular. Please let the record show that you were on the list, but we did run out of time, hon. members from all four parties.

With that having been said, I now declare the Assembly adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday pursuant to section 4(2) of our standing orders.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 28th Legislature - 1st Session (2012-2013)

Activity to March 14, 2013

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 199 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2012 (Redford)

First Reading -- 8 (May 24 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 177 (Oct. 23 eve.), 193-96 (Oct. 23 eve.), 233 (Oct. 24 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 336-39 (Oct. 29 eve.), 354-71 (Oct. 30 aft.), 373-80 (Oct. 30 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 476-84 (Nov. 1 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 10, 2012; SA 2012 c8]

2* Responsible Energy Development Act (Hughes)

First Reading -- 207 (Oct. 24 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 263 (Oct. 25 aft.), 424-43 (Oct. 31 aft.), 445-57 (Oct. 31 eve.), 526-46 (Nov. 5 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 563-71 (Nov. 6 aft.), 593 (Nov. 6 eve.), 644-48 (Nov. 7 aft.), 649-69 (Nov. 7 eve.), 731-53 (Nov. 19 eve.), 777-94 (Nov. 20 aft.), 795-853 (Nov. 20 eve.), 902-05 (Nov. 20 eve., passed on division, with amendments)

Third Reading -- 921-41 (Nov. 21 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2012 cR-17.3]

3* Education Act (J. Johnson)

First Reading -- 155 (Oct. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 219-31 (Oct. 24 aft.), 238 (Oct. 24 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 380-407 (Oct. 30 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 669 (Nov. 7 eve.), 688-94 (Nov. 8 aft.), 753-63 (Nov. 19 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2012 cE-0.3]

4 Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act (Scott)

First Reading -- 352-53 (Oct. 30 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 423-24 (Oct. 31 aft.), 593-614 (Nov. 6 eve.), 627-44 (Nov. 7 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 975-80 (Nov. 22 aft.), 1057-74 (Nov. 27 aft.), 1075-101 (Nov. 27 eve.), 1127-137 (Nov. 28 aft.), 1139-161 (Nov. 28 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 1161-166 (Nov. 28 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2012 cP-39.5]

5 New Home Buyer Protection Act (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 261 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 354 (Oct. 30 aft.), 457-59 (Oct. 31 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 546-49 (Nov. 5 eve.), 571-83 (Nov. 6 aft.), 585-93 (Nov. 6 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 853-55 (Nov. 20 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2012 cN-3.2]

6 Protection and Compliance Statutes Amendment Act, 2012 (Jeneroux)

First Reading -- 155 (Oct. 23 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 209 (Oct. 24 aft.), 264 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 459-62 (Oct. 31 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 855-56 (Nov. 20 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2012 c7]

- 7*** **Election Accountability Amendment Act, 2012 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 774 (Nov. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 972-75 (Nov. 22 aft.), 1015-41 (Nov. 26 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-167 (Nov. 28 eve.), 1191-92 (Nov. 29 aft.), 1221-43 (Dec. 3 eve.), 1261-79 (Dec. 4 aft.), 1281-1300 (Dec. 4 eve., passed, with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1315-37 (Dec. 5 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2012 c5]
- 8** **Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 2012 (Hughes)**
First Reading -- 156 (Oct. 23 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 233 (Oct. 24 eve.), 316-36 (Oct. 29 eve, passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 857-902 (Nov. 20 eve.), 943-53 (Nov. 21 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 953-56 (Nov. 21 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force December 10, 2012; SA 2012 c6]
- 9** **Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2012 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 156 (Oct. 23 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 209-10 (Oct. 24 aft.), 272 (Oct. 25 aft.), 311-16 (Oct. 29 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 462 (Oct. 31 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 856-57 (Nov. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on various dates, SA 2012 c4]
- 10** **Employment Pension Plans Act (Kennedy-Glans)**
First Reading -- 261 (Oct. 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 521-26 (Nov. 5 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 668-69 (Nov. 7 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 857 (Nov. 20 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Dec. 10 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2012 cE-8.1]
- 11** **Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2013 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 1424 (Mar. 6 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- (Mar. 11 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (Mar. 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- (Mar. 13 aft.), (Mar. 13 eve., passed)
- 12** **Fiscal Management Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 1438 (Mar. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- (Mar. 11 eve.), (Mar. 13 aft.), (Mar. 13 eve., adjourned)
- 13** **Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2013 (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- (Mar. 12 eve.), (Mar. 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (Mar. 13 eve., passed)
- 201*** **Scrap Metal Dealers and Recyclers Identification Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 92 (May 30 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 291-301 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 716-22 (Nov. 19 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced and agreed to)
- 202** **Public Lands (Grasslands Preservation) Amendment Act, 2012 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 130 (May 31 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 501-13 (Nov. 5 aft., adjourned)
- 203** **Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012 (Jeneroux)**
First Reading -- 473 (Nov. 1 aft., passed)
- 204** **Irlen Syndrome Testing Act (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 968 (Nov. 22 aft., passed)
- 205** **Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2012 (Calahasen)**
First Reading -- 1117 (Nov. 28 aft., passed)
- 206** **Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012 (Fraser)**
First Reading -- 1350-51 (Dec. 6 aft., passed)

Seniors' Advocate Act (Towle)

First Reading -- 1315 (Dec. 5 aft., passed)

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