



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

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Issue 37

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker
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Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
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Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Bhardwaj	Olesen
Cao	Pastoor
Donovan	Quadri
Dorward	Rogers
Eggen	Rowe
Hehr	Sarich
Luan	Strankman
McDonald	Xiao

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Khan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Anderson
Casey
Dorward
Eggen
Kubinec
Sandhu
Sherman

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Allen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Luan

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Cusanelli	Leskiw
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

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Forsyth	McDonald
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	Smith

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Deputy Chair: Ms L. Johnson

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Bhardwaj	Leskiw
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Allen	Hehr
Amery	Jeneroux
Anglin	Khan
Bilous	Pastoor
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Fenske	Quest
Goudreau	Sarich
Hale	Stier

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Allen	Hale
Barnes	Johnson, L.
Bikman	Khan
Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 18, 2013

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Hon. members, as we begin another week of the people's business, let us be mindful of the trust that has been placed in us and the privilege with which we serve. Let us now ask for the guidance of the Creator, that all our deliberations will be indeed honourable. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, led by M. Paul Lorieau. Please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway, Her Excellency Mona Brother. This is the ambassador's official visit to Alberta, and we're very pleased to welcome her here. She's accompanied by her spouse, Mr. Asmund Baklien, and Mr. Roar Tungland, the honorary consul for the Kingdom of Norway here in Edmonton, as well as by my wife, Mardell, and Tim Marriott from the protocol office.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Norway have much in common – northern climates, global leaders in energy – and we both have high expectations for environmentally sustainable energy development. I had the great pleasure of hosting the ambassador at lunch today, and we discussed a number of shared interests that our countries have.

These folks are all seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be making two introductions today. It is with great pleasure and honour that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House Madam Liu Yongfeng, the consul general of the People's Republic of China in Calgary, and Vice-consul Jia Xiaopan, who are both seated in your gallery today. Since Madam Liu took office, she's been a great friend to Alberta, focusing on increasing co-operation and understanding between China and Alberta. In fact, in the very first week of her assignment some two and a half years ago Consul General Liu welcomed the first group of Chinese visitors to our province after Canada received approved-destination status in China. There's been a 20 per cent annual increase of

visitors from China since then. It is now possible to see Rocky Mountains advertisements in subways in China's major cities.

Other key developments since 2010 include nearly 50 per cent growth in Alberta's exports to China; two-thirds of China's some \$30 billion of investments in Canada came to Alberta; dozens of new co-operation projects in advanced technology have been kick-started, notably between the University of Alberta and the Tsinghua University; and now nearly 10,000 Chinese university and college students are studying in our province.

Madam Liu Yongfeng is from the area of Beijing, where our Member for Calgary-Hawkwood is originally from. I'm sure that he's delighted to see her here today.

With the continued assistance of both Consul General Liu and Vice-consul Jia I'm confident that these numbers will continue to rise and would benefit both of our peoples. I would ask the members of the House to join me in giving our visitors the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: A second introduction, hon. minister?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yeah. Thank you. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House Mr. Tom Walter. Tom is a retired lawyer and business owner with extensive experience in various parts of Asia, including China and Thailand. He generously serves on the Asia Advisory Council as vice-chair. As chair of the council it's always a pleasure to work with Tom. I would ask the members of the House to join me in giving Mr. Walter the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you today a group of young students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake. As you know, Smoky Lake is the Pumpkin Capital of Alberta, home of the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Festival, and one of my favourite spots in my constituency. I had the pleasure of visiting with these 35 students on the steps here this morning. They're here for the School at the Leg. this week. The group is seated in the members' gallery. The students are accompanied by their teacher Ms Chelsea Evans and parent helpers Mrs. Arlana Phillips, Mr. Chad Mahon, and Mr. Michael Kozakewich. I'd ask the group to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 39 students and their teachers, Ms Janet Hurley and Mr. Roger Bouthillier, from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school.

SAM, as the school is fondly nicknamed, is a very special school in my constituency. SAM school was founded in 1958, making it the first school in the St. Albert public school system. It originally housed kindergarten through grade 12 but now, as St. Albert has grown, is strictly an elementary school. SAM holds a special place in my heart as it was the first school I attended as a young boy when my family first moved to St. Albert. The staff and students continue to make learning fun.

I have been privileged as MLA for St. Albert to visit the school a number of times, a remarkable school, I assure you, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that these students and their teachers rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations. It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly individuals from the Suzuki Charter School, a wonderful school found in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The best and brightest grade 6 students in my constituency are here. I'm pleased that they're able to take part in activities that will help them learn more about democracy. We have two classes of grade 6 – I hope that they'll stand behind me here and give a wave – and also their teachers, Mrs. Eva Kapy and Miss Shannon Eremenko, helped by parents Bonnie Gilroy, Mindy Dammer, and Anna Carlsen. If they could please stand and receive a warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Alberta international group. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask you to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you one of my constituents and a staff member at the University of Alberta, Mr. Sulz, who I had the pleasure of meeting with today at lunch. He's seated in the members' gallery.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nathan Stephan and his daughter Laurel from Red Deer. Nathan was a fellow candidate in the last provincial election and is a good friend of mine. Laurel is in grade 6 and is a top student in her social studies class, where she is learning about the role of government. I would ask Nathan and Laurel to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three constituents of mine from Calgary-Shaw. Two of these young students are here because their class is coming up later this week, and they were unable to go with them, so one of their mums decided to drive them up so they could come experience this with us today. I'd like to ask, please, Isabelle Wiebe, Jordan Betsworth, and Isabelle's mother, Patty, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Lorna Daniel, your sister, and I'm sure she's very proud of you today. Lorna is a retired paralegal who taught at Grant MacEwan College for 20 years, and she's also a resident of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Lorna is seated in the public gallery. I would like to ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

guests from the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Council members from the county of Grande Prairie No. 1 are visiting the Legislature today and attending the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties conference held this week. These have been peers and advisers of mine for many, many years, and I'll ask them to stand as I read their names. I'm proud to introduce to you Reeve Leanne Beaupre, Deputy Reeve Ross Sutherland, councillors Harold Bulford, Mary Ann Eckstrom, Pat Jacobs, Lois Dueck, and Brock Smith. I ask my guests to stand to accept the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my guests Noelle Jaipaul, Evan Hammer, and Cala Jorgensen from Next Up Canada. Next Up is a social and environmental justice leadership program focusing on educating young adults about various issues that face our society today and providing them with the tools to become more actively engaged and involved in our community. I would like to ask them to now please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Karan Nikhanj, who recently received the Queen's jubilee medal for his continued role in establishing and building the strong community of Twin Brooks within my constituency of Edmonton-South West. Karan has spent countless hours volunteering and establishing several activities, including the annual Family Day and winter carnival. This past month the community of Twin Brooks was able to celebrate the opening of our new outdoor rink, that was made a reality through the work and vision of Karan's continued dedication. With Karan today is his wonderful wife, Dr. Pam Chowdhury. I ask that Karan and Pam, seated in the members' gallery today, please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

High School Flexibility Program in Slave Lake

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Addressing the needs of students in education is one of our government's priorities. Today I want to applaud Slave Lake's St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy's proactive efforts in making the needs of students its number one priority.

The overarching goal of the high school flexibility program is to carefully examine ways in which the best possible experience can be delivered to each individual student. The decision of St. Francis of Assisi to embrace the flex program reflects an evolution in culture and philosophy within the school environment. Assessment practices, curricula delivery, institutional administration, and interdisciplinary study are closely scrutinized to ensure the best education possible for students with diverse and unique needs.

One of the goals is to strike a balance in the classroom that allows for a wide array of backgrounds and skill sets for students to work to their full potential. St. Francis of Assisi's student population is composed of many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and it is inspiring to see the staff take

responsibility for the services and aid they are striving to provide for their students.

Quality education is a cornerstone of what makes Alberta so successful. That is why it is crucial that we attend to the needs of all students regardless of economic or social background or other factors that may impede a positive learning experience. I am delighted with the quality of education St. Francis of Assisi has in promoting dynamic learning and for motivating its students to be successful. We could do well to learn from this example.

Congratulations to the board of Living Waters for great leadership and to the superintendent, the principal, and, of course, the teachers, who work toward educational innovation and success in this province and especially at St. Francis of Assisi. Thank you to all of you.

Wildrose Caucus Charitable Foundation

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I stand in this House today and it was with great pride that I stood earlier today with my 16 Wildrose colleagues to announce the creation of the Wildrose Caucus Foundation. You see, last year the PC government voted itself an 8 per cent pay raise. They sure didn't campaign on it. When I was elected, my salary was \$145,000. After the election it was \$156,000. [interjections] Now, you can throw out all the rhetoric that you want from the other side. It is what it is. One hundred and fifty-six thousand is greater than 145,000, and you shouldn't need a calculator to figure that out.

Here on this side in the Wildrose caucus we strongly disagree with that decision, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it's unfathomable to me that in an era when we're asking public-sector employees to freeze their salaries and take rollbacks, this government would even consider giving itself a raise. [interjections] Now, we tried to stop them. We voted against it in committee. We tried to appeal to common sense. We tried to explain how the public was perceiving this. But at the end of the day I guess they believe they are entitled to their entitlements. Well, we don't. So we have put our money where our mouth is. We are not going to take this money for ourselves.

Shortly before Christmas, Mr. Speaker, we set up a Wildrose Caucus Foundation, all 17 Wildrose MLAs giving back that PC pay hike, and we are putting it to good use. The 17 of us stand here proudly in unison on this issue. We will give that money to various charity groups in this province. We are going to do our best to help those that make a difference make even more of a difference. I see the heckling has died down.

We are not taking the raise. I would encourage all members of the Assembly to follow our lead and show some leadership. Taxpayer money should be respected. Taxpayers should be respected. We understand that, Mr. Speaker, and are showing some leadership. I think government would be wise to do the same.

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this is day 3 in the rotation, and it is my intention to continue the Speaker's direction of last week with no preambles to supplementals after the leaders have spoken.

I'll recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MLA Remuneration

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, you may recall the public outrage when the government forced through an 8 per cent pay raise for MLAs. Now, we warned that it would be difficult to convince the public-

sector employees that zero per cent was fair when MLAs were getting 8 per cent. Of course, the government insisted that the jump from \$145,000 to \$156,000 was a cut, but Albertans can count, and now, it seems, so can the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. On Thursday he admitted it was a pay raise. So let's ask the Premier: has the rest of government learned to count, too, and will you admit it was a pay raise?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

1:50

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government is focusing on building Alberta, while we're opening up pathways for Alberta products to reach markets offshore, while we're making decisions relevant to this budget, the best this opposition can do, as they have shown over and over again, is gimmicks: printing coupons, printing posters, and now trying to score political points on something that all of us are doing, donating to charity.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Helping Albertans isn't a gimmick. In fact, it's just as important as building playgrounds in Vietnam.

The Wildrose Official Opposition members are contributing their raises to a caucus foundation to make donations to important charities that do crucial front-line work in health care and education and social services. Will the government members follow our lead and do the same?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of government members, and all of our government members, probably without any exceptions, are making charitable donations quietly to charities of their choice. They don't need to stand up in the House and announce it to the whole world, because that's what they do out of the goodness of their hearts.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we can understand PC MLAs' reluctance to work with the opposition to make this a better province, but perhaps they'll set up their own foundation and return their 8 per cent pay raises to the people of Alberta. When can we expect that announcement?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental differences between our caucuses is that every member in our caucus makes their own donations to a charity of their own choice. They obviously need to orchestrate a media campaign to show that they make donations. The fact is that we have issues to deal with in this province. We're focusing on building Alberta. These guys will continue playing gimmicks. Let them do so. But looking at the efficacy of the Official Opposition, I suggest they should be donating more of their salary back to taxpayers.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for your second set of questions.

Ms Smith: I think Albertans would prefer to see them give the money back.

Provincial Fiscal Deficit

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government is taking Alberta back into debt, big debt, \$17 billion by the time of the next election. Now, in the run-up to the budget the Finance minister liked to paint a picture that government borrowing was just like a responsible family using debt to buy a house and then paying off the

mortgage over time. It was a folksy little story, but it was just as phony as the three-part budget that he brought down a couple of weeks ago. He finally admitted it last week, when he said that it's not a . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. The hon. member ended there with asking why we're trying to confuse Albertans. It's exactly the opposite. Albertans have been looking to their municipalities for years at their financial statements, which separate operating from capital. They've been doing that because they wanted to know what they spend on operating, and they wanted to know what they were spending on capital. This is very, very much a common practice not only in Alberta but across the country. It's unfortunate that the hon. members don't believe in the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. They don't believe in the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. They don't believe in the Scotiabank financial analysts. They don't believe in any of those financial experts.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we understand how it works. The \$17 billion in principal for all that debt isn't due until the end of the term, yet the paltry savings plan they lay out would take three or four generations to have enough money in the account to pay it all back. Why isn't there a realistic plan to pay back the \$17 billion in debt?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, on page 75 of the financial plan that we've presented is the debt repayment plan. The hon. member doesn't seem to understand that as we go out and borrow for these projects that have not yet been built, we're going to be getting different amortization terms. We're going to be getting different interest rates. We're going to have a very diverse and, frankly, financially sound plan to build the assets that Albertans need. Twenty-six billion dollars' worth of assets is what the \$17 billion represents. Those are the schools, the roads, and the hospitals that Albertans need today and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms Smith: The minister should know it'll take \$850 million a year set aside to be able to have enough money to pay it back. They're saying that they're building schools for all the kids that will be in Alberta in the future and that that's why they have to borrow, but those kids are going to face a \$17 billion debt repayment when they enter the workforce because there isn't enough money being set aside to pay back the debt. Why does the minister want to saddle future generations with all that debt?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, we have said this consistently in the House. The debt repayment plan is going to be set out as the debt comes onto the books because then we'll know. The Wildrose Alliance Party has kind of become the party of anger, fear, and bitterness. Albertans elected a government of hope, opportunity, and faith: hope for vulnerable Albertans to lift their station in this province; opportunity for young Albertans to create their dreams and fulfill their futures; faith in not only our Creator, as we pray in this House every day, but also faith in our people and this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. leader, your third set of questions.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we would build twice as many schools, and we would do it debt free.

Provincial Budget

Ms Smith: As Albertans try to understand the size and scope of the debt, they wonder about the government's lack of openness and transparency. Now, I feel the Finance minister demeans professional, hard-working journalists who try to explain government spending and debt in an understandable way as he quotes eastern investment bankers as evidence of support. Well, of course the bankers like it. They're going to be getting a slice of \$600 million in annual interest.

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

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, they keep waving around this plan, this capital plan, but they have yet to tell Albertans how they would pay for it. They have yet to tell Albertans where they would cut the additional \$3 billion in front-line services that they would have to do to actually do what she's talking about. That's why there are no financial numbers in their plan. They don't want to admit it to Albertans. If they don't want to listen to the financial analysts who most Calgary businesses and Edmonton businesses would listen to, how about the Consulting Engineers of Alberta? We know from previous experience that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. leader. First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's all in here for the Finance minister to read. That's how we would do it.

Now, the minister doesn't believe his critics know what they're talking about, yet his back-in-debt budget, of course, hides, obscures, fudges, and manipulates the numbers to avoid direct comparisons with other budgets. When is he going to comply with accounting standards and issue us a complete historical comparison like we've seen in other budgets?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this budget does comply with all of the PSAC and the generally accepted accounting principles. It's unfortunate that the hon. members opposite don't, because in their purported budget they don't present any financial numbers. They don't show us where they're going to cut \$3 billion out of their operating budget: doctors, nurses, teachers, all of them. All they show is a list of somewhat bogus savings plans that they have that won't achieve what they're talking about.

Ms Smith: The minister should know that he is supposed to restate the previous year's budgets with the new accounting standards that they're using, and he hasn't done that yet.

The back-in-debt budget has killed this Premier's promise that we will not incur debt – that's her quote – and not just this year but for decades to come, with huge borrowing and, as I've already mentioned, a paltry payback plan. Did the Premier just say one thing and plan to do another, or did she not think it was important to keep that promise?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there is an opposition that, you know, knows the price of everything, but they don't know the value of anything either. This government is focusing on building schools for kids today. They don't want schools 30 years from now. We are building seniors' homes for seniors today, not 30 years from now, and we are building, twinning, and paving roads today, not 30 years from now. If they want to do it in 30 years, tell Albertans that that's how they will do it. We will be building Alberta today not only for today but also . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.
The leader of the Liberal opposition.

Health Services Performance Measures

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AHS third quarterly report came out last Friday, and it is as abysmal as every other AHS report. Heart bypass surgery wait times: fail. Hip and knee replacement wait times: fail. Physician and staff engagement: fail. Patients admitted from emergency within eight hours: fail. All of these measures have been consistent failures for years. To the Premier: can you please explain to Albertans why your government is consistently incompetent when it comes to managing the health care system?

2:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's interesting how the hon. member has appointed himself judge and jury with respect to the efforts of a hundred thousand people in Alberta Health Services, a hundred thousand people who are supporting an influx of a hundred thousand new Albertans every year in a health system that is arguably the best in the country today and certainly the most well funded. We can talk in subsequent questions about many of the strategies that Alberta Health Services has implemented. I think they are to be congratulated for holding a very high standard of service despite . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'm simply referring to all the red dots, which mean failure, on the AHS report.

Given that this government has spent well over a hundred million dollars on for-profit continuing care beds that most seniors can't afford, resulting in them being warehoused in hospitals instead, the root cause of AHS's health care access failures, to the Premier: how much longer will you continue to fail Albertans before you follow the Alberta Liberal plan to double home care and invest in nonprofit long-term care so that we can free up acute-care beds and finally improve the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member is very good at talking about red dots, and he's probably seeing quite a few of them lately, and that was well reflected in the budget proposals that they presented to this House.

What I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has continually expanded continuing care capacity across this province. We're doing it in partnership with Alberta Health Services, also with not-for-profit providers and providers in the private sector. We're adding a thousand additional new spaces per year. We're delivering them in accordance with standards . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this hon. member is obviously great at creating red dots on the health system.

Given that AHS continues to fail significantly in reaching its very low target of 54 per cent for medical staff overall engagement, scoring a meagre 38 per cent, to the Premier: will you finally admit that this Health minister's combative and antagonistic approach to medical staff is an abject failure?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the award for understatement of the year has to go to the hon. member with that last remark. I think the definition of disengagement in public health care would be the hon. member leading the organization and saying some of the things he said to the hundred thousand people that work so hard to deliver the top health care in Canada to the citizens of this province. We can talk about many, many new initiatives that Alberta Health Services has launched in the last quarter, in the last four quarters. They're focused on Albertans' priorities, primary health . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The leader of the New Democratic opposition.

Bitumen Upgrading

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has betrayed Albertans by exporting their jobs to the United States. The Keystone pipeline will cost Alberta tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in investment. This PC government is so deep in the pockets of the oil industry that it's sold out the very people who elected it. Will the Energy minister tell Albertans why his government has refused to require bitumen to be upgraded here in Alberta before it is shipped down the pipeline?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, while this Premier right now is opening up an office in Ottawa to address issues of access of our products to markets and works in Washington diligently, we have two other parties in this House – let me tell you what they do – one so ideologically bound that they cannot even admit that there is a climate change, which in itself would block most of our products from most markets in the world, and the other one, with the federal leader of the NDP and now the provincial leader of the NDP actively sabotaging our oil and gas industry, making sure that our products don't make it . . .

Some Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's this government that should be ashamed.

We just can't trust this PC government to get value for Alberta's resources. The Premier has blamed the bitumen bubble, more accurately called the bitumen bungle, for the massive deficit budget, yet the same government is putting even more eggs in the bitumen basket by supporting the Keystone pipeline, a real job killer. To the Energy minister: why is this government undermining its own finances by supporting the export of even more low-value, unprocessed bitumen?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be careful talking about low-value contributions to the debate in this country and this continent. I can tell you that the strategy of this government is to ensure that we have as much upgrading and value added to our products in this province as we possibly can and, secondly, that exports are allowed to go forward to other corners of the world where it makes economic sense. We are pursuing all of these options. We're pursuing them responsibly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has been to Ottawa four times selling Alberta jobs down the pipeline. This government just spent \$30,000 on a misleading greenwash ad in the *New York Times*. In that ad this Tory government brags about adding

138,000 full-time, permanent jobs that this pipeline will create in the United States. Most of those jobs are at Albertans' expense. Why is the PC government betraying Alberta workers by exporting their jobs down the pipeline?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that we have to print ads in newspapers. The reason we have to print ads in newspapers is because the leader of the federal and the provincial NDP parties would have this industry lie flat on its back, an industry that pays for services not only in Alberta but throughout Canada.

Also, I should remind the leaders of both NDP parties that it is the building trades of Alberta and Canadian affiliates that are very much supportive of the pipeline that we are so much advocating both in Washington and Ottawa, so not only are they betraying Albertans and Canadians but also their unions.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.

Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Program

Mr. Saskiw: This Justice minister's soft-on-crime agenda just keeps on rolling. First he stopped GPS tracking of sex offenders and other violent criminals. Next he gave vandals and thieves two free passes. Now he's cutting enforcement against drug dens and prostitution houses. The safer communities and neighbourhoods program was doing a great job targeting and cracking down on crime; that is, until this former Liberal staffer Justice minister and his progressive crime agenda began to take shape. To the minister: doesn't he realize that his new hug-a-thug approach is just putting our neighbourhoods at risk?

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again, just as we had last week, very little of this member's statement is true. But since the member talks about being a Liberal, I suggest that maybe he look to the woman in a red jacket, their leader, who called on city council to set up a red-light district, or to his own party, which called for less enforcement on highway 63, or to his own party again, which opposed cracking down on drunk drivers. That's the Liberal agenda there.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order at 2:08.
The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister: given that the safer communities program was achieving results and making our streets safer and given that these criminals aren't just going to go away because the minister isn't doing his job, precisely what are you doing to protect our families from drugs and prostitution now that you've axed this important program?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you right now what we're doing. We're keeping cops on the street, we're keeping prosecutors in the courtroom, and we're adding two new judges. You'd think that a lawyer of so many years' experience like the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills would get behind this anti-crime initiative instead of spewing rhetoric in this Chamber.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister: given that under your watch you have cut monitoring and enforcement against sex offenders, vandals, thieves, and now

drug dealers and pimps, how can Albertans trust you to do your job, protect our streets, and put victims of crime first?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, we have done no such thing. All of these items are still strictly prosecuted. There are consequences in this province to crime, and I want to promote also that it was this Premier who started the civil forfeiture office, which takes money out of the hands of organized crime and into community-based groups, where it belongs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to cool it down a little bit.

Labour Negotiations with Teachers

Mr. Xiao: Mr. Speaker, last week the Alberta Teachers' Association accepted the government's offer on a province-wide deal and will recommend it to teachers. This is, no doubt, good news for Alberta families, but I understand that it is not a done deal yet. To the Minister of Education: what happens now that the ATA is accepting the deal and they're recommending it?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the agreement with Alberta's 40,000 teachers and this government is great news for Alberta families and, more importantly, for Alberta students. I'm very pleased we could work together to ensure the stability of the education system and to live within our means. What happens now, after about two and a half years' worth of work and efforts have gone into this agreement: the opportunity will be given to local teachers to vote, and I'm optimistic and hopeful that they will support it. Of course, it's only broad brush strokes on a provincial framework. There are still many local issues that need to be discussed with the local school boards, so that has to happen as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister. I'm hearing that the school boards are concerned they were not involved. Why did you leave them out?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the school boards through the body of the ASBA have been at the table for much of the last two and a half years. Much of what we agreed to with the teachers last week was based on a February offer which was presented to boards and boards overall and reluctantly supported back in February. What changed in the agreement was an assurance that the government compromised on that we wouldn't proclaim legislation that might affect working conditions of teachers during the term of the agreement. That's not something school boards can offer. That's something only this chair can deliver, and we did for the sake of our kids.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Xiao: My last supplemental question to the same minister: can you assure the parents that limiting instructional time of the teachers won't impact the class time for Alberta students?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what the agreement does is frame some expectations on the workload of teachers around the amount of minutes they can spend in the classroom and the amount of

minutes they can instruct, not the amount of minutes that a student would spend in the classroom. There's no difference, going forward, to any instructional time that students will receive. You know, I recognize this is a potential change moving forward that won't really change the practice in Edmonton and Calgary because these expectations are already there, but it may have implications on rural Alberta, and we're going to watch those very closely. We've got some mechanisms in place to help the rural boards.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Physician Recruitment

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, we know that this government defends things like their own 8 per cent MLA pay hikes by saying that we need to attract quality candidates, but when it comes to the need to recruit quality physicians to our province, this government has no problem using doctors as a punching bag, breaking promise after promise. Dr. Michael Giuffre has even called Alberta the most antidoctor province in the country. How does the Health minister expect to have any credibility talking about the need to recruit physicians while demanding they take a . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very interesting question from an hon. member that comes from a party that is promoting that we shouldn't be spending as much on public services as we have committed to in this budget. A very interesting question indeed. The fact of the matter is that Alberta physicians are the best compensated in Canada, 14 per cent above the national average. We have a budget of \$3.4 billion to compensate just under 8,000 physicians. With the co-operation of the Alberta Medical Association we believe there are better ways to invest that money more efficiently.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has broken its promise to call an inquiry into physician intimidation in our province and given that this government has broken its promise to physicians to have an agreement in principle after the election, how will this government assure Albertans that this prolonged dispute won't drive physicians out of the province?

Mr. Horne: Just to finish my response to the earlier question, Mr. Speaker, there's half a billion dollars in increased funding for health care this year. I'd invite the hon. member to explain to this House how she would allocate that money. Would she allocate it to increases in physician compensation? Would she choose homecare, which she's spoken about in this House on several occasions? Would she include increases for continuing care or mental health? This is a question of using good judgment to make some difficult decisions in challenging times. When our starting point is 14 per cent above the national . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to answer that question. I'd allocate it to the front lines and not his bloated bureaucracy.

Given that there are warnings that the squeeze on physicians will cause problems with patient care, including increased wait times and reduced access to quality care, does the minister have

any concerns about what damage the fee dispute will do to the patients in this province?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that there are many issues with respect to how we compensate physicians that have a positive impact, when properly resolved, on the patient care experience. Family practitioners are an excellent example. We live in an age where patient complexity is greater than it's ever been. Many Albertans are living with multiple chronic diseases. Family doctors want to spend more time with those patients directly and also support them by working in teams with other professionals. There are opportunities within this \$3.4 billion to make those sorts of opportunities a reality.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Market Access for Oil

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have all heard about the bitumen bubble. My constituents are concerned about what this means to our economy. To the Minister of Energy: rather than using buzzwords, what steps are you taking to actually fix our market access problems?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this government is exceedingly active right across the board, seeking ways to get oil out of this province in all forms, whether refined and upgraded or in raw form, to the west coast, to the south to the Gulf coast, to the east coast, and maybe even to the north coast. This government is very active. I would say that it's very interesting to observe that the Official Opposition, by virtue of their position on climate change, is inactively campaigning against Alberta interests whereas the NDP is actively campaigning.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member's response.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The member has the floor, hon. members.
Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since the government has been talking about belt-tightening, why did you decide to pay thousands of dollars to place an ad in the *New York Times* this weekend?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's a very active debate going on in America, and it is in Alberta's interest and Canada's interest that we're there and part of that debate. You may not have noticed that last week there was a very positive piece in *Time* magazine. There have been positive pieces. There have been pieces like the *New York Times* editorial. We're in the battle here to defend Alberta's interest. The Official Opposition is undermining us, the NDP is undermining us, and the Liberals, thank goodness, are missing in action.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. We all understand Premier Redford is opening a new Alberta office in Ottawa today.

The Deputy Speaker: No preamble, hon. member.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why do we need a new office in Ottawa?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, since the CPR was built across Canada and the last spike was driven at Craigellachie, this country has been built by great national efforts, and this once again is one of those great nation-building opportunities that Alberta is leading the nation on, working with our cousins in Saskatchewan and other provinces. To build this country, we need all the allies and friends we can get. We need to have people well informed, and that is part of what we're doing in the Ottawa office.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder, hon. members, that we cannot use the names of members of the Assembly, please.

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

Physician Services Agreement

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been two years since the contract with Alberta doctors expired, and we are again at an impasse. This minister has tried to impose a contract, a 20 per cent cut to office practices over the next four years, and he has failed to put in place a fair process for resolving the conflict. Physicians are talking of early retirement and moving elsewhere, and we already have a doctor shortage. To the minister: what is plan B?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is alluding to a very public offer that the government made to the Alberta Medical Association last fall to add \$463 million in additional funds to physician compensation, he would be correct, but he is incorrect in his characterization of these negotiations. This government has bargained in very good faith with the AMA for the last two years. The AMA has worked in good faith with us as well. There are many challenges in providing physician compensation. There are also many opportunities, and we'll continue to explore them.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sure you will.
The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: To the same minister: is your plan to do without family doctors and run family care clinics with nurse practitioners?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we seem to be entering the realm of conspiracy theory. The only goal this government has is to maintain our consistent position over the last decade as the jurisdiction that compensates physicians the best in Canada. That is currently at 14 per cent. The hon. member should also know – he heard a budget delivered recently that said that we would be holding the line on public-sector compensation across the board. This includes physician compensation. Everybody has to do their part. I'm confident that the doctors of Alberta want to do their part.

2:20

Dr. Swann: To the minister: are you refusing arbitration because you know the arbiter will rule in favour of the doctors or because you think you can just outwait them?

Mr. Horne: Well, I'm not going to get into the details of the negotiations in the House. One thing is clear, Mr. Speaker. We know the total amount of money that is available to allocate for physician compensation in the next year. It is the same amount that we have in place this year. The question before us is how we pay physicians and for what we pay them and whether or not we

use that budget in a way that truly acts to meet the needs of Albertans: the need for more family doctors, the need for better access to mental health services, the need for access to geriatric and other services that benefit seniors.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome the minister for advanced education and to bring him up to speed on his portfolio. On Friday hundreds of Albertans arrived at the Legislature to demand that this government stop breaking its promises. Unfortunately, while they stood together in the snow, the minister was building sandcastles on a beach. To the minister: why do you think it's okay to break your promises to Alberta students and their families?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I was doing some of that quiet charitable work that the Official Opposition would publicize in the House, actually doing some great infrastructure work in a country ravaged by the NDP ideology back home. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader of the NDP, you're rising on a point of order? So noted.

Mr. Lukaszuk: They don't like it when the similarities are being pointed out.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that I have been very clear that there will be no tuition increases as a result of this budget. We have increased financial support to students for those from low-income families who will require it, and we are now working with chairs and presidents of all universities and colleges and technical schools in making sure that they receive a mandate letter with which they can work and that they will contribute . . .

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on Friday staff at the U of A were asked to give up five days of pay next year to help with budget shortfalls and given that universities are already considering expensive market modifiers and mandatory fees to top up tuition, will the minister admit that this government's fiscal incompetence is being downloaded onto staff and students and families throughout Alberta who are involved with universities?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that we will continue working with our schools, all 26 schools within Campus Alberta, to make sure that they continue delivering the great education that they have been for years in this province. Yes, there will be budgetary challenges. That's no secret. However, I know that we will find administrative efficiencies not only in each individual school but in the entire sector of 26 schools, and our students will continue receiving the best education in, let's be reminded, still the best-funded postsecondary education system in Canada.

Ms Notley: Given that we also have the highest tuition and instructional fees in Canada and given that this government promised a 2 per cent funding increase to our institutions and given that the budget actually delivers a decimating 7 per cent decrease to those institutions, why couldn't the minister be bothered to pack his bags, come home, and defend his broken-promises budget in person?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there will be a time and place in this House when I will be defending my budget line by line, and I

hope that member shows up and states her concerns. In the meantime I will continue working with all presidents and chairs, and I will continue working with student organizations. One thing I can tell you is that the student body will be more involved in the decision-making process than they perhaps have been in the past.

While they want to spell out doom and gloom, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta will continue to have one of the most innovative and relevant education systems in the world.

Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors

Mrs. Towle: Last week's back-in-debt budget is hitting hard-working Albertans right in the pocketbook. All across Alberta families are being gouged with massive education hikes, and sadly seniors are also under attack. This government is changing and ultimately ending an assistance program that helps seniors with rising property taxes. I have been flooded with calls from seniors who say that they may have to leave their homes if these planned changes by the government continue. To the Associate Minister of Seniors: why does this government continue to reach into the pockets of vulnerable Albertans to find dollars for their own fiscal mismanagement?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Seniors.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, and thank you for the question. There's no doubt that there's a grant program that's in place right now that will end and a new, better program that will begin. In this budget we talk about the seniors' property tax deferral program that will be laid out, not where you get a \$162 average grant per senior, but you'll get an average of \$2,000, the ability to spend \$2,000 the way you want, not to the municipality to defer your education and your property taxes in part or in whole. That's what is in the budget, \$2,000 versus \$162. Pretty good math to me.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government be honest and tell Albertans how many seniors you are kicking off the property tax assistance program currently by lowering the income thresholds to qualify?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I can make it very clear that any senior couple that owns a home and whose annual income is over \$63,700 will be cut off.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mrs. Towle: So how many seniors is that?

For the property tax deferral program will the minister tell seniors what the interest rate will be on that program and if the interest rate will be daily, fixed, term, or variable?

Mr. VanderBurg: First of all, to qualify for the seniors' property tax you have to be a senior, you have to have 25 per cent equity in your home, and you'll be paying prime rate or lower on that deferral program. As we announced, as the budget process goes through, all of this will be rolled out into a program that seniors can qualify for this taxation year, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Little Bow.

Education Concerns in Calgary-Glenmore

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I held a town hall meeting in Calgary-Glenmore with over 100 residents attending to present their concerns. The top two topics were education and transportation. My questions today are for the Minister of Education. My constituency has over 20 schools, many of which are close to 40 years old. Can the minister advise my constituents whether funding will be available to renovate or retrofit these aging schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I can't advise the hon. member on those specific schools, but I can tell you that Budget 2013 does reaffirm this government's and our Premier's commitment to building Alberta, investing in our communities, investing in our families. We will be building new schools. We will be modernizing schools. There are going to be 70 school modernizations announced in the coming months. I'd say: stay tuned with the budget. We hope to have some announcements this spring and others to follow in the fall.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another challenge facing some of the Calgary-Glenmore schools is increasing enrolment. Bishop Grandin high school will be close to capacity again.

The Deputy Speaker: No preamble, hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: How can the minister's department support the use of modulars at my constituency's schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a great demand for modulars. We have a budget that allows us to traditionally deliver about 45 per year. We've got requests for about 400 and for another about 90 moves. What I can tell you is that we've done some creative things this year, and we're going to be able to roll out about 105 new modulars and move about 90, which is significantly more than we have done in the past. Once again, we're going to help every community we can. It's a testament to this Premier and what she wants to invest in families and communities.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to literacy and numeracy skills what budget measures will expand and support the mastery of essential skills by our student population?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's a great question that we can discuss more during the budget over the next day or two. But I can tell you that Albertans have told us loud and clear through Inspiring Education that literacy and numeracy need to be central in the core of our curriculum. As we look to change the way the education system is operating, focusing less on memorizing facts and teaching kids more what to do with knowledge and how to apply it, that's exactly what we're doing with our curriculum. We're going to unpack that curriculum to make it less prescriptive and much more innovative and creative so that our teachers work to their full scope.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Farm Fuel Distribution Allowance

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, this government has put us back into debt, and now it seems to be a race to the bottom. They're asking Alberta's farmers to pay for it. I'm a proud Alberta farmer, and when I talk to other Alberta farmers, they're angry. They're furious at this government's decision to cut the Alberta farm fuel distribution allowance. It's a tax hike. Farmers want to know. Is this tax hike about belt-tightening or axe grinding?

2:30

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, surely this hon. member is being a little mischievous when he describes the removal of a rebate as a tax hike, especially from a party that talks a lot about removal of subsidies for people.

No, it is not a tax hike. It is a reasonable move in times of fiscal restraint. This is a move that still leaves us with the most competitive support for farm fuel use in Canada.

Mr. Donovan: On March 6 when I bought farm diesel, it was 6 cents cheaper than it was on March 7. You call it not a tax hike? Whatever.

My point: is this progressive government planning to build Alberta, or are we going to cut out Alberta agriculture?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, for a couple of years now jurisdictions across the country, including the federal government, have been working on taking innovative approaches to supporting agriculture. That includes market development, research, and innovation. It is true that there is a move away from ad hoc funding of programs. We're not alone in that. There is a consensus across the country that in order for our producers to be competitive in the world and to have a sustainable industry, that's what we have to do, and that's what we are doing.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, it was never ad hoc, this 6 cents.

Would this minister please respect Alberta's hard-working farmers, reconsider this tax hike, and rescind it?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I'll just repeat that without the 6-cent rebate – and I'll just remind the hon. member that we were the only province in the country that had a rebate over and above an exemption – we still have an exemption which is better than neighbouring provinces. Other provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have a partial exemption. Ontario has an exemption for off road only. We support our producers, and we're going to continue doing that.

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

Support for Child Care

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the strategic directions of our government is to invest in families and communities. However, I continue to hear each week from families who live in Edmonton-Decore about issues related to the quality, affordability, and accessibility of child care. My questions are for the Minister of Human Services. Given that our province has a rapidly growing population and limitations on financial resources as a government, are we likely to fall further behind in terms of the accessibility, affordability, and quality of our child care and early learning system?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not falling behind at all. In fact, ensuring that Albertans have access to quality and affordable child care continues to be a key priority. Edmonton and area, for example, has 34,000 child care spaces, and 79 per cent of those spaces are occupied. Obviously, there are still spaces available. At the end of 2012 Alberta had 96,000 child care spaces, and 80 per cent of those were occupied. So 20 per cent is still available. Now, there are problems in some suburb areas where the spaces are not where the children are, and that work still needs to be done. We've had a lot of . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the not-for-profits have had a lot of success in our communities, to what extent are there government plans to provide more support for not-for-profit child care given our province's current circumstances?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it bears repeating that we have the online child care lookup tool, which makes it possible for parents to search for all licensed and approved child care programs.

Now, the hon. member will know that we don't differentiate between for-profit and not-for-profit child care in terms of the programs that we have. We actually support individuals who need support, and we will continue to do that. In fact, we raised the income threshold levels to \$50,000 last year. A hundred per cent of the subsidy is available for any family that's under the \$50,000, and if they have more than one child, that income level goes even higher.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: given that child care in Canada has been criticized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and others for the lack of a comprehensive developmental approach to early learning, can the minister tell the Assembly what the government's plans are to move to a more developmentally based, comprehensive child care system?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the fact that the Premier has tasked Human Services to lead a project with Education and Health and other ministries in the government on early childhood development. We're very cognizant of the fact that investing in young children, doing early testing and early screening with young children and helping young children get a good start, is one of the best investments we can make as a society, and we're working very hard in that direction.

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

Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not long ago this government embarrassed itself when it twice tried to run through a backdoor deal to sell Crown grazing lands north of Bow Island to a potato farm. The government was forced to back down because

of widespread public opposition. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: did the government pay any compensation for their breach and, if so, how much?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to remind this Assembly that our Premier was the one to cancel those leases when we came into leadership here under her leadership and was commended by different groups. This government took action on that. We took action right away, and we are committed to that action.

Mr. Barnes: It's not the cancellation of the leases; it's the cancellation of what might have been a signed contract.

Will the minister tell Albertans how they can trust this government when a special deal was initially done without any public input or without a competitive bid process?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell this Assembly and all Albertans is that with the leadership of this Premier and this government they will be assured that any process of Crown lands that go through will be as we have them in our process. It will be through a public process. The Premier has committed to that. I will commit to that. We've been commended by different groups because of the process of cancelling those leases.

Mr. Barnes: Compensation was the first question.

Given that the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill asked about this in the House and no clear answer was given, I will ask again: is the Brewin ranch purchase near Purple Springs part of the payoff for allowing the government to cancel the Bow Island grazing reserve contract?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was asked last week by one of our hon. members with regard to Purple Springs: is there a contract or a request within the government? We have received no request with regard to that in our ministry. When we do, we will use the proper process through ESRD, that is in our legislation, to deal with that piece of property.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Traffic Court

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I accidentally got a speeding ticket on the QE II, coming up to Edmonton. [interjections] Shame, I know. There's a bit of shame there.

Also last week, to my concern, we heard a lot about the traffic courts here in the Assembly and plans to eliminate all traffic prosecutors and to close rural traffic courts and mandate that all future traffic tickets be paid, with no option to plead not guilty. My question is to the former Liberal staffer here, the Minister of Justice. While you have confirmed that none of these falsehoods are true, what is being done to make our traffic courts more efficient?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy I'm not wearing any red today, with that question.

Throughout this entire province there are a lot of traffic offences, and I'm happy to confirm to you that I've not had one speeding ticket on highway 2 in five years of being an MLA. All things considered, there are more than 1.9 million traffic tickets issued and about 218,000 criminal charges, so this can clog up a courtroom. One of the things that I'm looking at right now is actually moving traffic court outside of our court centres, particularly in Calgary and in Edmonton.

Mr. Webber: Well, if the traffic courts are going to be taken out of the courtroom, Mr. Minister, then won't it have an impact on access to our justice system?

Mr. Denis: I actually think it would have a positive impact. If you go to the Calgary Courts Centre or the Edmonton court downtown, a few blocks from here, typically you go through airport-style security. On top of that, you're also dealing with places downtown that may not be accessible to the average person. I've been downtown and checked out traffic court. There's a long, long lineup. Maybe we should start looking at locating it elsewhere.

Mr. Webber: To the same minister: how much money can we save as taxpayers if we make traffic courts more accessible by moving them out of the courthouses?

2:40

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question because every budget I've had as a minister has indeed gone down. Taxpayers' dollars are very important to me. I can tell you that we don't have a specific number to look at yet. We're just in the very early days. We will table a report at a later date when we actually have further information about how much money this can save.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, we got through 17 sets of questions and answers today. Thank you for your co-operation.

In 30 seconds I'll call for the balance of the members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Phil Meagher

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to have this opportunity to recognize a previous colleague and a good friend of mine, Phil Meagher. Phil is currently the longest-serving member of municipal council with the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo and just successfully completed a cross-country ski fundraiser in support of the plan to end homelessness. Phil completed a 280-kilometre trek called the Ski for Hope on March 10 after battling freezing temperatures and a bout of pneumonia to reach his goal.

The campaign, which would take him from Fort Chipewyan back to Fort McMurray, was to raise funds for the Fort McMurray Centre of Hope homeless shelter and donate skiing equipment to Keyano College's Fort Chipewyan campus. He set off on February 23, hoping to take about 40 hours to finish, but he ran into trouble in the final 50-kilometre stretch. Freezing temperatures, poor conditions, a wrong turn, and exhaustion put him out of the trip temporarily. Phil had to be transported to hospital, where he was diagnosed with pneumonia. Despite this

setback, he vowed to finish his trek. On March 10 after nearly 10 hours Phil passed the finish line and raised more than \$12,500 for the Centre of Hope.

I'd like to congratulate Phil for this amazing feat. It takes a lot of courage to make this trek, and I applaud him for his dedication to end homelessness in Fort McMurray.

You know, Mr. Speaker, for many of us working and living in the north, we sometimes take for granted life's basic needs and forget that there are those among us who have to fight to survive in our resource-rich community. Because of the high cost of living in Fort McMurray it presents unique challenges, and it's more of a struggle for us than perhaps other communities in Alberta when one is forced onto the streets. That's why I'm proud that our government has made a commitment to end homelessness in our province with its 10-year plan, which began in 2007. Since then we've made great strides by partnering with communities and their local agencies like our Fort McMurray Centre of Hope and McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Earth Hour 2013

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My community of Sherwood Park, like many others across the globe, will be participating in Earth Hour 2013. Earth Hour is a world-wide initiative to show how we can all work together to build a sustainable future and combat climate change. Earth Hour asks governments, businesses, and individuals to show leadership and take personal responsibility for their climate impact. To symbolize their commitment, participants are asked to turn their lights off for one hour between 8:30 and 9:30 on March 23. Mr. Speaker, I know our Legislature will be dark as well.

The first Earth Hour was held in Sydney, Australia, in 2007 and involved 2.2 million homes and businesses. The next year participation grew to 50 million in 35 countries. In 2012 over 7,000 cities in 152 countries turned off their lights for the sixth annual Earth Hour. Global landmarks such as San Francisco's Golden Gate bridge, the CN Tower in Toronto, and the Coliseum in Rome all went dark.

It is estimated that shutting off nonessential lights in Canada for one hour could save 15 per cent on an average Saturday night's power consumption. By turning off their lights, participants show that they care about energy efficiency and climate change. I urge all of my colleagues in the Legislature to join in. You can find out more or register your participation by googling Earth Hour Canada 2013. While one hour a year may not make much difference in overall energy consumption, it raises awareness of these important issues. It also demonstrates the power of an idea and global concern about climate change. Together we can make a difference.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Prostate Cancer Awareness and Screening Initiative

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday saw another tremendous example of community and business coming together with the announcement of the combines for cures initiative to bring prostate cancer awareness and screening to rural Alberta.

This program was the idea of Tony Overwater and was coordinated by the Prostate Cancer Centre, situated at the Rockyview hospital in Calgary-Glenmore. The founding sponsor is Agrium, who is joined by Monsanto, Bayer CropScience, Penn West, and Brett Wilson and the Birthday Boys. Each of these organizations has committed \$300,000 over the next three years to support the project.

The statistics around prostate cancer are frightening, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta prostate cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer, with 1 in 7 men being diagnosed, and unfortunately 4 per cent of these men will die of the disease. Prostate cancer is treatable if detected early enough, and that is the focus of the combines for cures program. By having a simple blood test after the age of 40, a baseline reading of the PSA chemical can be recorded and monitored later. Early detection leads to early treatment and in the majority of cases a cancer-free life afterwards.

The next step for the combines for cures program is to purchase a Man Van so that the simple blood test can be taken locally. Rural farmers can also support the initiative by donating grain to their local CPS retail outlet. The money raised from the sale of this grain will also go towards the purchase of the new Man Van.

My colleagues the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Associate Minister of Wellness applaud the vision of these organizations to support a healthier future for rural Alberta. I encourage all of my male colleagues to get tested and that we each encourage our constituents to do so as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Support for Education

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to contrast this government's deeply flawed vision for education with the Alberta Liberal plan. The PC's intellectually and morally bankrupt budget proves they see education as a cost to be cut. This is why the Premier is cutting per-student funding in our public schools and why postsecondary institutions are being walloped with a whopping 7 per cent cut at a time of growth. This is no way to prepare for the future.

The Alberta Liberals have a different approach. We see education as an investment which pays huge returns for our kids, our families, and our taxpayers. One reason we would bring in fair taxation on the wealthiest Albertans and large corporations is so that we would have the money to invest. We would increase investments in education so that we can eliminate school fees, reduce class sizes, bring in full-day kindergarten, invest in early childhood education, and make schools community hubs.

Alberta Liberals would also increase funding for postsecondary institutions so that they do not have to nickel and dime students and burden them with the highest tuition and mandatory non-instructional fees in the country and needless debt.

Education at all levels must be affordable and accessible, and students must receive opportunities to develop their skills. For this reason, we would restore the summer temporary employment program so that students can earn money for tuition and develop communication and organizational leadership skills and get that ever-important first job. The Premier calls STEP a crutch, but students and Alberta Liberals know it's a great investment. We call on the government to listen and step back from STEP funding cuts.

Mr. Speaker, an affordable and accessible education system is good for our kids and their families, but it's actually good for our economy. With cuts to an underresourced education system, it's

no wonder Alberta has the lowest high school completion and postsecondary participation rates in the country and industry actually has a shortage of skilled workers.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for the regressive conservatives . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much. I have three tablings today. The first is a series of letters, 400 in fact, from the Michener Centre, individuals who have been affected by the closure of the Michener Centre, and their families – 400, Mr. Speaker – and the appropriate copies.

The second is a report from the Parkland Institute called Delivery Matters, in which it shows the high cost of for-profit health services in Alberta compared to nonprofit.

The final is a blog post by Susan Wright from Calgary, who writes on the site Susan on the Soapbox. She calls it Redford's Keystone Ad in the New York Times: The St Patrick's Day Blunder and refers to communicating the right message to the right audience in a half-baked message to the wrong audience.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 700 letters from my constituency office, letters that are referring to the cutbacks that are happening at the Michener Centre and the closure of the Michener Centre. So I have five copies of 700 letters.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or someone on his behalf. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of one of the many e-mails we've received about this PC government's cancellation of the STEP program. In this e-mail Kasey Murphy of Lethbridge tells the story of how the STEP program completely changed her life. She writes: "I am disheartened by the losses that will be suffered by the organizations that utilized STEP and devastated for all the lost opportunities for fellow and future students. I would not be where I am today without this program." The cancellation of the STEP program, which the Premier referred to as a crutch, is yet another example of this government's broken promises to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a letter from Mr. Neil Evans of Edmonton, who writes a very thoughtful letter regarding our fiscal structure. He calls it "a failed and dysfunctional tax system" that is, in his words, "intentionally designed to maximize the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few." It's a very good letter. I would urge all members of this House to read it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I just have two quick tablings, Mr. Speaker. The first one is an article from the *Calgary Herald* from the Leader of the Opposition that talks about: "Calgary might as well establish a red-light district."

The second is five copies of an article from the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills dated August 30, 2012, in which he calls for eight permanent law enforcement officers on highway 63, falling short of the 16 that we offered.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is the appropriate number of copies of e-mail submissions that Albertans made to the NDP caucus for our budget tour, which visited seven cities in February. Nic, Venessa, Jane, and Emilea are some of the Albertans who have provided valuable input. For example, Nic David from Cochrane would like to see a real investment in long-term care facilities for the elderly so that hospitals can be freed up and used for their intended purpose. Submissions like this clearly show the priorities of Albertans.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of the government's advertisement placed recently in the *New York Times* which identifies that there will be 42,100 direct and spinoff jobs for Americans during construction and an average of 138,000 spinoff jobs per year.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, could you just table the document? It's not a member's statement.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The ad clearly indicates the tremendous economic benefit the Keystone pipeline brings to the United States economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2012 annual report for the year ended December 31, 2012.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have two points of order. The Member for Airdrie rose at 2:08, and we have a second point of order at 2:21 from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Citation, please, Member for Airdrie.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Inflammatory Language

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker I rise under Standing Order 23, particularly (h) and (j); subsection (i) as well, but (h) and (j) are the main ones. It is, of course:

23. A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member;

- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

The reference here is to the Minister of Justice when he stood up and said a few things.

The first will relate to 23(h) “makes allegations against another Member,” or (i) “imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.” He started out by saying that this party over here wants to put less enforcement on highway 63, and he refers to the tabling that he just made where the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills specifically asked for eight officers to be enforcing traffic on highway 63. At that time the government had not made an announcement as to increased enforcement on highway 63, so what he was advocating for at that point was an increase of enforcement. Since that time the minister responded to this Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and has in fact put more folks on the road than eight, and that’s something that I know this member supports and our party supports. So that is just completely a false accusation. He should withdraw that because he knows that’s false and he’s doing it on purpose.

The second is regarding the issue of this red-light district. Let’s be clear, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose Party has been exceptionally clear at all times that we do not in any way, shape, or form support legalizing prostitution in this province. We’ve been very clear on that. There is no doubt that there is an article that has been specifically tabled from the *Calgary Herald*, I believe, a document wherein the Member for Highwood has entertained the idea of red-light districts. She has been very open about that, and her views have changed on that over time. The point is that to somehow impute that as the member’s position today is false. It’s not correct, and I would ask him to withdraw that. That covers subsection (h), Mr. Speaker.

Subsection 23(j) is “uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.” Mr. Speaker, words are very important in this Legislature. I think we’d agree that there are lots of incendiary things sometimes said in this Legislature, and we talk about that. But when a question is asked about prostitution in this House by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and the minister on that question about prostitution refers to the woman in the red dress to the left, that is unacceptable. That is absolutely unacceptable. This minister should know better than to use words that I believe were intentionally meant to demean the Leader of the Official Opposition and draw the comparison between the question on prostitution to the woman in the red dress. Just saying woman in the red dress, frankly, is shameful and disrespectful and wrong.

If we had said that same thing about this Premier, if we had even insinuated something like that, I guarantee that that side of the House would erupt – and rightfully so – because it would be completely disrespectful to do that, disrespectful and wrong to call somebody a woman in the red dress. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we’re talking about a question on prostitution, which was the last thing that this member had asked about, and this minister gets up and refers to the leader of our party as that woman in the red dress. That is awful, and he should absolutely withdraw those remarks and apologize to this leader for demeaning and insulting comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I’ll recognize the hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I once handled a case where I was representing someone in a case involving defamation, and it comes back over and over again that the truth is

an absolute defence. You can say that you had damages, slander, libel, but the truth is an absolute defence.

Mr. Speaker, I just tabled to you, on the first item that the Member for Airdrie indicated, an August 30, 2012, document where the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills calls for at least eight more permanent law enforcement officers on highway 63. We offered 16. My comment was that he wanted fewer officers on the road than our government did and than we later offered.

Secondly, I’ve already quoted over and over again the Leader of the Opposition’s reference to where she wants legalized prostitution. “Calgary might as well establish a red-light district . . . City council should establish a red-light district and begin to clean up the neighbourhoods – and the profession,” referring to prostitution. Again, for me to say in this Assembly that she did say that and she did support that even though her views may have changed – she hasn’t indicated anything to the contrary. But for me to say that she did say that at one point, again, Mr. Speaker, is true.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my reference to the Leader of the Opposition was to someone in a red jacket. I did not say a red dress. The red jacket, to me, refers more to her liberal policies on crime. You note that later in the final exchange that I had with the Member for Calgary-Foothills I referred to my tie. I referred to that I wasn’t wearing any red. I was making a simple reference to the colour of her policies. We all have colours in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and it is completely disingenuous for anyone to suggest unavowed motives. I would suggest that if you could have a point of order on a point of order, you could do that.

I’m going to tell you one more thing, Mr. Speaker. This member should apologize to every member of this House.

Thank you.

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. [interjections] The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor. Hon. members, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and speak to the point of order raised by Airdrie. I want to speak in support of it, not in the sense that any of the words of the Leader of the Official Opposition, whether after she was elected or before she was elected, have been used against her by the Justice minister, but specifically on the point of connecting her apparel to the question dealing with prostitution. I think that the hon. Justice minister is not being as straightforward about his motives as he should be. It is, in my view, a reprehensible and sexist remark. The minister should stand and apologize for the implication that he has made because I think it is not befitting someone who holds a high government office such as himself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I might draw your attention. It seems to me that we’re continuing a narrative that was started last week, essentially around appropriate language. I draw your attention to page 1598 of *Hansard* from last week. In that exchange it just reminded us that expressions which are unparliamentary, of course, call for prompt interference. It includes

- (1) the imputation of false or unavowed motives;
- (2) the misrepresentation of the language of another.

I think we’ve heard some varieties of what may or may not have been said and what was intended. I think it’s always difficult when we start going down that road.

Language really is subject to a lot of interpretation, and 23(h) and (i) do remind us that language that imputes allegations is not in order in the House, nor any abusive language.

It goes on at the bottom of the page. The Speaker spoke.

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

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect . . .

And I emphasize respect, hon. members.

. . . for the integrity of all Members. Thus, [any] offensive, provocative or threatening language . . .

I'm not suggesting that there was any threatening language heard or repeated by anyone, but it does have the opportunity, hon. members, to cause disorder.

Again, I would just caution all members to remember that respect goes above all else in this House. I believe that we can all do better. I don't agree that there's a point of order here, and I would just encourage all members on both sides of the House: we can and we must do better.

The second point of order was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Hon. member.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to cite section 23 of the standing orders.

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

I rose on that point of order after listening to the response of the hon. minister of advanced education to my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona's questions about cuts to postsecondary education and, in particular, about the minister's prolonged absence from this House at a time when the estimates were being debated. He's in the House today.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's response in part – and I don't have the Blues – was to the effect that he was bringing infrastructure to a country that has been devastated by, ravaged by the NDP's ideology. Previous Speakers have made a number of rulings in the past with respect to similar matters. This hon. minister has a habit of engaging in red-baiting when it suits his purposes, but there have been rulings respecting that type of comment on May 25, 1990; March 26, 1990; August 19, 1986; November 28, 1990; and November 29, 2007.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was raising legitimate questions in this House about the serious cuts to postsecondary educational institutions contained in this budget. They are, in fact, the hardest hit of any institutions in the entire budget. The budget of the minister of advanced education has sustained some of the largest cuts, and these are causing a great deal of inconvenience and problems for the postsecondary institutions: for the faculty, for the students, and so on.

The member was quite rightly calling him to account for having a lengthy vacation at the time when his budget was first announced. His response was, of course, that he was there helping a country who had been ravaged by ideology similar to our party's. I want to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, and to the ministers and all members of the House some significant differences between the positions of our party and those of the government of Vietnam.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if I may. Just a reminder, hon. member, that a point of order is not an opportunity to prolong

the debate. You've cited a citation. I'm hoping you'll keep your arguments to that offence, so to speak. I'd really appreciate it.

And just as a reminder, hon. member, we don't refer to absences in the Chamber as a matter of practice.

Please continue.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want though to be able to show why the minister's statement was false and insulting. Our party is very proud of its defence of human rights, something that goes way back in the history of our party. Many of our outstanding leaders, including Stanley Knowles and others, have been at the forefront of protecting human rights in this country and in this province.

Our party has "democratic" in the name, and we believe in free and fair elections, freedom of speech, and so on, many of the things that may not exist in the Republic of Vietnam, that the minister was just vacationing in. We have quite different economic views as well. So there is no legitimate comparison in any way between the views of our party on economic, political, or ideological issues and the government of Vietnam, and I believe the minister knows that to be true.

Mr. Speaker, what it was was a cheap shot from a minister who has no other recourse because he's been caught very much in the neglect of his duties by my hon. colleague and was being held to account for that.

Our party believes in the full right of all parties in this House to stand up free from intimidation from other members and to state their views and to question the government and to hold it to account without being intimidated by the kinds of statements that came from the mouth of the minister of advanced education.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that he withdraw those comments and apologize to the House. Thank you.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the comments of the leader of the NDP fourth party. The member is very selective in his memory of what occurred in the House. He fails to acknowledge the fact that his colleague was in no uncertain terms making provocative comments relative to my charitable trip to that particular country and preferred to depict it as some kind of two-week vacation of, I believe she said, lying on the beach, which is quite unfortunate.

I guess they have very thin skin. They can dish it out, but can't take it when it's coming back. I'm not sure whom to apologize to, whether to the country or to this member, but I have a feeling that since he is quoting the standing orders of this Assembly, he wants me to apologize to him and to this particular House.

I won't be splitting hairs on the similarities and differences between the ideology of that country and his party. I think we could spend a full day debating the similarities and maybe a few minutes the differences. Nonetheless, if it's causing this member so much hardship being compared to another jurisdiction with similar ideologies, I do offer him that apology.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Anderson: I wish that that was an apology that one could get behind, but anyway, Mr. Speaker, I want to support the point of order. Clearly, there is a point of order here. Clearly, what was said was very incendiary. To compare the NDP and our hon. members in that NDP caucus with an ideology that has been

responsible for some of the worst human rights violations in the world is shameful. We have lots of differences on policy in here, but I'll tell you one thing. The New Democratic caucus clearly support human rights and many other principles in our democracy that make us strong. I think that it's key that this member watch his tone as we go forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I think the points raised in this particular point of order bear a lot of similarity to the one that we dealt with earlier. We talked about language. Language is everything. Language can inform, but it can also sting. I think it would behoove us and be helpful from both sides if we kept our questions and answers to government policy.

With that, the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education has offered an apology. I would like to accept that apology on behalf of the House because he has made one, and I consider this matter closed.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

Provision of Continuing Care Beds

Q14. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

As of June 1, 2012, what proportion of continuing care beds were provided by Alberta Health Services, not-for-profit agencies, and for-profit agencies respectively?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government always announces that they are creating beds in the province for seniors. In years past they gave to the affordable supportive living initiative grants to build seniors' living facilities, and these were broken up between P3s and lodges. These dollars are awarded to the RFP applicants from both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. We would like to know the percentage in each year that goes to for-profit versus not-for-profit.

It's an issue that surrounds, as we've mentioned in the House, a lot of concern respecting both the cost and the quality of care these recipients receive. Typically, the developers that are building or have already built housing that is to be used for low-income seniors raise the issue that they may not receive the same quality of care as those in the not-for-profit sector.

Some for-profit providers recognize that the filling of the accommodation is only one component of the profit base. The added component would of course be the supportive living side. These for-profit providers typically make their profits on the care side. So that basically reflects our interest in trying to better understand some of this.

Long-term care fees were raised in January 2013. The maximum accommodation charge that operators can now apply in long-term facilities increased by 5 per cent, or a maximum daily increase of \$2.80, effective January 1, 2013. Although these raises seem realistic when looking at the rate of inflation, this does become an increase in corporate welfare in some instances of private establishments. We on this side of the House, the Liberal opposition, believe that all facilities, for seniors in particular, are part of the health care system and should be not-for-profit. There is never any real accountability in regard to buildings that are for profit.

We have a difficult time determining what the numbers are and what they may mean, so we're asking for some comparative data there, which truly is in many cases a subsidization of the corporate interests because, in fact, they may or may not pay their staff the same as government institutions and, obviously, would pocket the difference.

So I stand to await the response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I have relatively few comments moving forward here. We've indicated that we don't believe this matter should proceed for a number of reasons. I think we had this discussion largely on another matter last Monday. I don't have any further comments. I'm not going to belabour the House. I don't like to continue things where we're simply belabouring the horse that's being flogged in the middle of the House here, so I'm going to take my seat.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we see that this government is not prepared for these questions. These questions go in months and months and months in advance. This has nothing to do with the question that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek brought up last week with regard to nursing ratios, LPN ratios, and health care aide ratios. A strict staffing-to-client ratio was what they were looking for. It had nothing to do with how the beds are allocated, whether they are supported by not-for-profit agencies or for-profit agencies.

Once again what we see from this government is no openness and transparency with regard to how tax dollars are being spent, especially in the areas of health and continuing care and long-term care. We know for a fact that this government actually does know how many nonprofit beds there are and how many for-profit beds there are and how many Alberta Health Services beds there are. Why they're reluctant to let all of the rest of Alberta know exactly how many beds there are available is, quite honestly, beyond me.

The Premier mentioned during her campaign and has said for the last 10 months since we've been elected that she'd like to raise the bar on openness and transparency. This government budgets and allocates dollars accordingly. They send out their money and tell clients that they know they have enough continuing care spaces. They talk all the time about how we need more long-term care beds. They talk all the time about how they're increasing beds by 1,000 continuing care beds, yet every time they're given the opportunity to sit in this House and actually define where those beds are, how they're allocated, how they're funded, how they're staffed, they can never seem to be able to show up and actually do their job.

It seems baffling to me that this government repeatedly shows up to this House and is never able to answer a fundamental question about the beds that they have for continuing care, the beds available for long-term care, which are housed in for-profit agencies, which are housed in not-for-profit agencies, and which are even housed in the Alberta health system. It's interesting that this government talks about the extensive budget for long-term care, the extensive budget for continuing care but can't say where this money is going. That's absolutely atrocious and clearly incompetent.

3:20

The other part of that is: how can Albertans believe and trust this government when they say that they know what's best for seniors as they age in care? How can they possibly know measurable outcomes if they can't even identify where the beds even are

and what facilities are housing what types of beds? We have no idea if the for-profit sector is doing a better job than the nonprofit sector. Or is the nonprofit sector doing a better job than the for-profit sector? Or are both sectors doing a better job than Alberta Health Services? We have no idea because every time this government is asked this question, they're never here to answer. They're never able to find any information with regard to this, yet they're spending \$16 billion worth of money on health care.

It seems atrocious that they're not able to answer to Albertans. How can they possibly tell Albertans across this province that they know what's best, that they have measurable outcomes, and that benchmarks are being met if they don't even know where the dollars are going?

How embarrassing this must be for this government to be so ill prepared for written questions that have been on the Order Paper for months and months and months. The reason they're on the Order Paper and the reason they're in writing is specifically to give this government the opportunity to do the research that is required to provide Albertans with an educated answer and to be open and transparent about where tax dollars are sent. It absolutely is astonishing that this government still comes to these written questions ill prepared, and it almost speaks of incompetence.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member protests way too much.

I have the privilege of moving on behalf of the Minister of Health an amendment to this written question, moving that Written Question 14 be amended by striking out "as of June 1, 2012," and substituting "as of March 31, 2012." The amended written question would then read as follows:

As of March 31, 2012, what proportion of continuing care beds were provided by Alberta Health Services, not-for-profit agencies, and for-profit agencies respectively?

The hon. Minister of Health will be able to answer that question and has no problem accepting the question if it is amended in that fashion. As the hon. member who proposed the question will know, there are a constantly changing number of things, and you have to pick a point. It's easiest if we agree to pick a point where the numbers are actually available rather than trying to extrapolate to another date. I understand that there may have been discussions between the Minister of Health and the hon. member with respect to the amendment. I hope there have been and that the change of date will be acceptable to him.

Dr. Swann: I would speak in favour of the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Wonderful.

Mr. Mason: The concern I have – and it may be a concern with the original question as much as with the amendment – is that it talks about a proportion. That means the numbers we'll get back are percentages or fractions. I would ask the Minister of Human Services if it would be the government's intention to provide actual absolute numbers of beds in each category.

The Deputy Speaker: He can only speak once.

Are there others?

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 14 as amended carried]

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

Community Treatment Orders

Q15. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

How many community treatment orders were issued under section 9.1 of the Mental Health Act between April 1, 2010, and April 1, 2012?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are orders for people to be treated in the community as opposed to in a facility. The impact of cutting beds to the extent that the government has in regard to mental health has led to higher numbers of individuals treated in the community. While this is seen as an important tool for mental health treatment, the question is: are we getting to the point where it's being used to compensate for the lack of institutional beds where needed?

There's a high possibility of harm to patients themselves if they receive substandard care in relation to their needs and also a risk that they may harm others. There's a possibility that they might be incarcerated in the wrong type of facility due to the wrong understanding or ability to regulate their behaviour in certain institutions into which they are forced because of lack of appropriate space. Statistics are not released in the regular course of affairs that will provide information needed to assess the impact of these policy decisions such as bed closures on these individuals affected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health. I'm proposing on his behalf an amendment to this written question and allowing the opportunity for the pages to circulate copies of this.

May I continue?

The Deputy Speaker: Please read it into the record, hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. I wasn't sure if you were rising for something, sir.

The amendment proposes changing the range of dates in which the numbers could be provided. The question would read:

How many community treatment orders were issued under section 9.1 of the Mental Health Act between January 1, 2010, and March 31, 2012?

Mr. Speaker, the change in the range of dates between April 1, 2010, and the same date in 2012 – interesting day – to between January 1, 2010, and March 31, 2012, reflects the period where these numbers are available. My response to the amended written question will be the cumulative summary of the community treatment orders, or CTOs, as reported by AHS for the day on which the CTOs were effective on January 1, 2010. I'd ask all members to support the amendment to the written question.

I will take my seat with that. Thank you.

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

Speaking to the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm interested in the amendment, Mr. Speaker, from the point of view that I would like to be able to compare year over year. If the numbers are presented in a fashion where we can actually make that comparison even though, I guess, it would be 15 months one year and 12 months the next – as long as we can compare numbers and rates, that would be helpful.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening intently, and the hon. member has moved an amendment. "How many community treatment orders were issued under section 9.1 of the Mental Health Act between January 1, 2010, and March 31, 2012?" That is what the member has put forward in the amendment whereas in the original one the member asked the government the following question: "How many community treatment orders were issued under section 9.1 of the Mental Health Act between April 1, 2010, and April 1, 2012?" I can see that what we're only talking about is one month if I'm correct.

I think it's important to get what information we can, quite frankly, because I was in debate when we brought this particular order through, and the community treatment orders are something for which I would like to see how many people are being released into the community. For me, it's not as much the beds, but with these people that are moving into the community, how many of the orders have been made under the community treatment orders? We will accept that amendment, but I will go with the hon. member who brought the written question forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

I'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 15 as amended carried]

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

New Special-needs Child Care Spaces

Q16. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

How many new special-needs child care spaces were created in Alberta between January 1, 2008, and January 1, 2012?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most families that work need child care space, and typically with a higher income people have a higher number of options. With lower and middle income there is greater dependency on the availability of affordable child care spaces. The availability of special-needs spaces is particularly short. With fewer options middle- and low-income families are held by the parameters of availability to public options.

3:30

This is an important quality-of-life and income issue. We need to ensure that government is providing for these children as per their requirements. If a single mother, in particular, who has a special-needs child cannot find an appropriate space, her availability to enter into constructive alternate work and better her and her child's future is greatly impacted. We're trying to determine how many special-needs child spaces have been created and ensure that this meets the population needs of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this particular question. Unfortunately, I'll have to indicate that the question should be rejected on the basis that the question is founded on an incorrect premise, that a portion of funding from the making spaces initiative was allocated specifically for the purpose of creating special-needs child care. That, in fact, is not the circumstance.

Mr. Speaker, the making spaces initiative inspired the creation of approximately 20,000 spaces in total between 2008 and 2011 across the province. While a portion of the funding was certainly used to create child care spaces that support children with special needs and their families, decisions for what types of spaces were created were made at local levels by child care programs based on local needs and therefore were not tracked by our program.

The Ministry of Human Services works with children with special needs and disabilities and their families in a number of different ways and provides support through a number of different avenues. When it comes specifically to child care, the ministry provides child care subsidy support to assist eligible low- and moderate-income families with the cost of child care. As of September 2012 more than 16,700 families were receiving child care subsidy supports. Of these, 78 per cent received the full subsidy, and 22 per cent were helped with partial subsidy supports. More than 500 of these families receiving subsidies for child care services have children with special needs. Keep in mind that this is in addition to a variety of other initiatives our ministry has available to serve these families, including family supports for children with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, it would be my suggestion that the situation with respect to a family where there is a child with special needs would not be supported through the funding of a program to create new child care spaces specifically for children with special needs because we don't know where those might be needed at any given time. Rather, it would be to work with a family through FSCD to determine what their child care needs are and how we can support them to get those child care needs through FSCD.

So while I appreciate the member's question and the concern in this area, a concern that I share, I have to reject the question because I actually don't have that kind of information with respect to specifically creating spaces for special-needs children. We don't actually do that. We did fund through that process the creation of spaces. Some of those spaces would have been created for children with special needs. But where we actually identify and support the need for child care for children with special needs is through the FSCD program. That would be one of things that would be considered in terms of the support the family might get through that particular program.

Regretfully, because I think it's an important topic and certainly an important concern for Albertans, it's not something that I can respond to with an answer with respect to the written question in that way.

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

Are there others?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you can close debate on the question.

Dr. Swann: Well, I would like to close debate. I'm puzzled because the minister just said that he understands that 500 children with special needs are being cared for in the system, and then he says that he can't provide the numbers, so there's an inherent contradiction in what he's saying. Are you monitoring them or

not? If you are, why not give us the 500, then, as a statement if that's the correct number? Surely, we need to monitor this to identify whether there's an unmet need for children with special needs.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Written Question 16 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Student Loan Amounts for Medical School Graduates

Q17. Dr. Swann asked on behalf of Mr. Hehr that the following question be accepted.

What is the average amount owed in student loans by a student graduating in 2011 with a medical degree from an Alberta university?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This speaks to affordability and accessibility of postsecondary education but medicine in particular. It directly impacts the Alberta economy and the availability of workforce and may speak to doctor recruitment and retention.

After graduation the jurisdiction that a student may wish to practise in will most definitely be influenced by their outstanding debt upon graduation and possibility of high pay scales. Young doctors carrying a high debt may be less likely to move into a smaller community, where they will be receiving less pay, and their cost of living in the city is generally less than living in a rural area. I take that back, Mr. Speaker. That sentence doesn't make sense.

Lifestyle and cultural accessibility are less present in rural areas, and with a high debt load they may wish to stay in a larger centre in order to seek opportunities for advancement, particularly through specialization. Young students, when looking at cost of education, may choose to seek their education elsewhere, and the result of this is often practising elsewhere, where there are more flexible alternatives to their current practice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand there has been discussion between the ministry and the member under whose name this question stands on the Order Paper. He is aware that I will be moving on behalf of the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education that Written Question 17 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "amount owed in student loans by a student graduating in 2011 with a medical degree from" and substituting "amount of total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student enrolled at" and (b) by adding "who entered repayment in 2009-10" after "Alberta university."

The written question as amended would then read as follows:

What is the average amount of total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student enrolled at an Alberta university who entered repayment in 2009-10?

Again, Mr. Speaker, the reason for the amendment is really one of timing and being able to provide information that is available. I'm given to understand that the numbers with respect to 2011, which were in the question, wouldn't be available as yet but that the 2009-10 numbers would be available, so the minister would be pleased to provide the information with respect to the numbers we do have with respect to that particular context.

Also, changing the wording from "amount owed in student loans" to the wording "total federal and provincial loans": I'm guessing here, but I would believe that the reason for changing that was that we wouldn't necessarily know what students owed with respect to any other student loans they might have from private institutions or elsewhere, but we do know the loans that they got through the Alberta student loan process, which manages the federal loan program and the provincial loan program.

As I say, as I understand it, this has been shared with the mover of the motion. I can't tell you that he's agreed to it or not because I don't have that information here, but I do know that it's been shared with him. The purpose of the amendment really is to streamline the question so that it refers to available information now. Certainly, as the information for the next year comes available, I would encourage the hon. member to approach the minister for that information.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, I would speak against the amendment at least in the sense that it's written. There are two options within the amendment. There are two amendments. I think we need to sever them and decide on each of them separately. For example, I can agree with the 2009-10 period, part (b), but I can't agree with striking out the "amount owed in student loans" because that's precisely what we want to know. How much debt do young physicians incur in medical school?

It may be one thing to talk about loans, but it's actually quite another thing to ask – and we could compare them to other provinces – how much debt they have, and that's part of the problem. We have among the highest tuition in the country, and that's part of the reason why we want to know how much debt is being incurred, how much discouragement there is to getting a medical degree and to going into family medicine because of high debt load that they've been incurring and giving incentives to go into specialty practice, where they can pay off high loans quicker. Part (a) doesn't address the real question, so I'd like to sever these two and vote on them separately, part (a) separately and the (b) amendment separately.

Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister responsible for SPD.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member doesn't appear to be aware that there are private student loan instruments such as a student line of credit offered through any chartered bank in our country. Of course, there are other private loans, even family loans, for example. Surely, he can't expect that the government would have access to such information; therefore, we can't report it. If that remains the content of the question, then we'll be rejecting the question because we simply can't meet the terms of the question.

I think it's an entirely reasonable amendment, and I think it should be passed as is.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's an interesting time, and it's an interesting question that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has asked. He's talked about the fact that he'd like to know: "What is the average amount owed in student loans by a student graduating in 2011 with a medical

degree from an Alberta university?" Then the government comes back, and they don't say anything about the privacy issue or anything. They talk about an amount owed in student loans by a student graduating in 2011 with a medical degree and substituting "amount of total federal and provincial loans provided to a medical student enrolled at an Alberta university."

The hon. member talks about the privacy of the loans. What the government is proposing is that they want to talk about the breaking up of the amount of total federal and provincial loans provided and adding that after "an Alberta university."

I think this is a good question, actually. With the things that are going on right now with the AMA, all of the contracts and negotiations that are going on right now in this province in regard to what I am going to say are negotiations in regard to pay, I think it's important that if someone is looking at going for a degree and going into a medical profession, they know how much debt they're going to face when they graduate.

You know, you would think that the government would like to know what debt students are incurring when they go to university. It's not that we're asking for every student. Just tell us exactly: if you're going into the medical profession or, for that matter, engineering or the teaching profession, what is the student going to incur as debt? It's interesting to me why the government would not want to have this information as they plan for the future like they say. They're always criticizing the opposition about: we're stuck in the past, and we don't talk about the future.

You know, I guess I'm wondering why there's so much controversy over this particular question.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Now back to the question as amended. Are there others?

[Written Question 17 as amended carried]

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

Workers' Compensation Board Complaints

Q18. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

How many written and telephone complaints has the ministry of employment and immigration received related to the Workers' Compensation Board in each of the fiscal years from 2002-2003 to 2011-2012?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The numbers of complaints to the ministry about WCB reflect dissatisfaction with the board and, obviously, relate to conflicts over denial of claims, proper medical care. It's clear to me as an MLA for eight years that there are significant problems still unresolved with the WCB system that relate to the appeal period, which is only a year. In many instances this is very difficult for people to meet given their illness or their injury, their rehabilitation, the financial implications for them and their families, some of the emotional turmoil that some of them are going through. So that appeal process is a real problem for some.

There is inconsistency in providing claims in some instances. As I've heard, there is in some cases confusion between who is supposed to be paying the injured worker, the employer or WCB, and some conflicting documents that go back and forth. There are independent medical exams that conflict with the medical exams

within WCB, and there is a sense in many instances that there is an incentive for WCB to force people back to work prematurely, resulting in earlier problems and conflicts. There is an unwillingness in some cases to deal with the psychological impacts of the injury and the financial impacts of the injury on the family and the failure to address some of the extra needs of some individuals, not all but particularly some, who develop mental health problems or have addiction problems or whatever their illnesses are.

These are the kinds of issues that I think would be reflected in the numbers of complaints and how they've changed over the years and how well the appeal process is working in WCB and how well we're getting people back to full health and function and therefore able to work and support themselves and their families.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister of PDD.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and address Written Question 18. I'll do so first by expressing a little outrage at the preamble and the discussion of that hon. member, who pointed to – I just was writing as fast as I could – confusion about who pays, whether it's the WCB or the employer. There's absolutely no confusion. It's an absolutely ridiculous statement. Conflicts, inciting the workers to return to work prematurely, ignoring addiction problems or mental health concerns: those are outrageous allegations, none of which, I might add, are actually asked for in Written Question 18. It's just a drive-by shooting of a whole bunch of people that work very hard in the WCB.

I can tell you, getting back to Written Question 18, which only deals with the number of complaints that the WCB receives – and somehow we should use workers' complaints as measures of the full litany that will be recorded in *Hansard* there. I think the member might want to apologize to the workers at WCB, particularly when he understands the information that I'm about to talk about.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the member can appreciate that over the last 10 years they dealt with a great number of workers in greatly trying situations, and they received a great number of inquiries. They do indeed record the number of inquiries that they get, whether that be by phone or written or in person. In the period from 2002 to 2011, which is the last full year that we have, the inquiries have fallen by more than 50 per cent, thereby refuting another of the member's allegations. Furthermore, recognizing that the number of inquiries might not be a great measure of the number of people that they actually deal with because a particular complainant might phone several times or a person seeking information might phone several times, they actually also record the pure number of claimants who phone. I can report that that's fallen by well over 50 per cent.

I am prepared that tomorrow at the regular time I will be tabling the results of those. However, those are not actual complaints, and I cannot tell the member the breakdown of complaints: just straightforward inquiries, inquiries as to the status of a file – did they receive the information? – those sorts of things. I cannot actually answer the member's question about the number of complaints that were received. Mr. Speaker, we've been around to the table officers, and there is no way to amend this question in such a way that meets the legal requirements of the question that he's asked. So despite being able to provide the information that I will table tomorrow, the information I just referenced, I'm moving that we reject Written Question 18. I still will be tabling the information nonetheless.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, having been in industry for a number of years and paid into workers' compensation on behalf of the employees that worked with me, I'm interested in this, too. I think it does need to be taken in context, as has been suggested. I think the number of complaints compared to the total number of issues satisfactorily resolved would be an important figure to understand. I think it would be helpful to the Workers' Compensation Board itself to want to know how many complaints they received about their service or about their attempts to resolve these issues as a way to monitor their own effectiveness. I'm pleased to hear that the number seems to be dropping, but at the same time I think the hon. minister implied that they aren't tracking how many complaints there really are, and I think that they ought to.

3:50

While the question doesn't specifically address that, I think it's an inadequacy in and of itself, and that should be tracked. It will be useful both to the board in its own internal self-regulation as well as to the industry and our employees, who look to the board for assistance and for relief and for help. If there's a perception that they aren't being treated fairly – I can tell you that in our office workers' compensation issues are, in fact, among the most popular concerns that we receive calls about, so there is something there. If there's been improvement, then I feel sorry for my predecessor because he must have had to put up with an awful lot more than I have.

I think it's important that people know that the government, through the Workers' Compensation Board, really does care and that they can actually sufficiently help to really provide genuine and substantial relief. I think it's a good question in the sense of what's implied along with it, and I would hope that whether the question itself meets the criteria that the government thinks is important, they would at least sense the intent of the question. I don't think the intent is to embarrass. I think that the intent is to monitor and to get some feedback. The board itself should be looking for feedback because you can't course-correct if you aren't measuring, and if you aren't measuring, then you won't notice where deficiencies really are.

That's what I'm interested in, and I think most of us are as well on both sides of the House because we're here to represent people, some of whom have been injured while on the job. We need to be able to reassure them that the board is serious about trying to care for them or that we can act on their behalf if they do have problems that do need I won't say intervention but the assistance, perhaps, of our various offices.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is an interesting discussion. I want to rise and mention on behalf of the associate minister that we agree that that's good information to be tracked, and we'll endeavour to track that information going forward. It's interesting because for a period of time up until the April 23 election and a few days thereafter, when the Premier was good enough to appoint an associate minister, I had that responsibility for the WCB in my area. One of the things that I was quite excited about was the fact that for the first probably 10 years of my serving as an MLA, in my constituency office workers' compensation was one of the key issues. Workers' compensation and maintenance enforcement were the two big issues that came into the office.

Over the last five years that has actually reduced considerably, and that's because of the changes that were made and because of the efforts that were put in to ensure that the Workers' Compensation Board understands its mandate about helping injured workers get back to work and supporting them when they're not in a position to do so. In the first few months when I had responsibility in my office for WCB, I was very surprised at the fact that we got very few complaint calls either from members of the public or, quite frankly, from other MLA offices, which was quite interesting to me.

But the hon. member has a good point. We should be tracking that. It's not definitive because, of course, as you pointed out, people go to various places when they have concerns. One of the places they tend to go – and I think they should – is to MLA offices. Sometimes they come directly to our offices, sometimes they come to the department, and most often they maintain their dialogue with the WCB or perhaps the Appeals Commission.

Just tracking that number in and of itself is not definitive, but I think it's fair to say that the numbers have gone down considerably over the last number of years and certainly in the period of time in which they were in my office and now in the associate minister's office. It would be useful, I think, on each call that comes in to track to see whether it's just a call for further information and action or whether there's actually a complaint being registered about the way the files have been handled or about the policies that are in place.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there are others?

Seeing none, I'll call the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much. Well, thanks to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I think he's really offered a friendly amendment, that we would like to know not only how many complaints but how well they were resolved. I think that's a reasonable suggestion to improve the efficacy of the question. I'm sorry the government is not able to honour the question and give the information, but I appreciate the minister tabling it tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Written Question 18 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Inmate Population at Correction Institutions

Q19. Dr. Swann asked on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

What are the government's estimated projections for the increase in prisoners expected in provincial correction institutions as a result of the recent changes to the Criminal Code, Canada, including but not limited to mandatory minimum sentences, reductions in two-for-one credit for time served in remand centres, toughening drug and alcohol laws, et cetera, per year for the fiscal years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The increasing number of federal inmates combined with the rising per capita cost of incarceration have made it increasingly expensive to operate and maintain the prison system. The per capita cost of incarceration for all inmates increased by almost 37 per cent from 2000 to 2011.

The prison system is increasingly overcrowded. At issue is whether overcrowding might lead to more inmate misconduct and recidivism. The results of research on this topic have been mixed. One study found that overcrowding does not affect inmate misconduct or recidivism. Other research suggests that there is a significant positive relationship.

The inmate-to-staff ratio has also increased. The growing prison population is taking a toll on the infrastructure of the prison system. The departments have a backlog of modernizations and repair projects. Past appropriations left the prisons in a position where they could expand bed space to manage overcrowding but not reduce it. However, reductions in funding mean that the ministry will lack the funding to begin new prison construction in the near future. At the same time, it has become more expensive to expand Alberta's prison capacity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his submission, but it is with regret that I'm recommending rejection of Question 19, posed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, as set out in the Order Paper on November 1 of last year.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of problems with the written question. First of all, the term "prisoners" refers to only sentenced inmates. I know the member was trying to help us, but we don't cover that. Statistics maintained by my department only capture inmates, which refers to remand and sentenced inmates.

There are also some issues with the changes to the Criminal Code referred to in the question. Mr. Speaker, bills C-10 and C-25 are the federal government's recent primary amendments to the Criminal Code that may impact correctional operations. For the most part they are supported by this government. All provisions within Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, have been in force since November 2012.

Parts 2 and 4 of Bill C-10 are anticipated to have the most significant impact on correctional services as they relate to restricting the use of conditional sentences, increasing some mandatory minimum sentence provisions, and amending the provisions in the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Unfortunately, they don't deal with mandatory minimums for drunk drivers causing death, but that's another issue. The full impact of the legislation won't be realized until the end of fiscal 2013-14 or even later, I would suggest.

With respect to Bill C-25, the Truth in Sentencing Act, this actually came into force in February of 2010. This legislative amendment restricted the amount of credit available for time spent in pretrial custody. Previously you would have received two for one if you had served time in custody prior to your sentencing.

This information the hon. member has asked for is not captured in a way that generates statistical information or projections as data related to the enhanced credit received by Alberta inmates was not sufficiently available to conduct this type of analysis.

This notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, my department can provide information on the growth of the adult custody population after this bill came into force in February 2010, as I had referenced. Therefore, I've asked my department to provide this information to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in a timely manner.

While I am recommending rejection of this question as proposed by the hon. member, I always welcome her suggestions as well as those of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View on how to keep Albertans safe and secure in our communities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

4:00

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this written question. I think the numbers here should be readily attainable. It's important that we have the projections for the increase in prisoners so that we can of course build the appropriate facilities to ensure that they're maintained and to ensure that we put as many bad guys behind bars as possible.

What I am concerned about with the refusal to answer this question is that perhaps there's an incongruence with the new federal Conservative tough-on-crime approach with what we're seeing to be a continuation of a progressive soft-on-crime approach with the current Justice minister. It's unfortunate that he would not be in communication with his federal counterparts to ensure that their legislation is going to be appropriately dealt with with respect to the provincial jurisdiction when it comes to prisoners.

I don't know if this dramatic change that this progressive Justice minister is implementing here in Alberta – of course, we've seen it with the fact that he doesn't believe that individuals for first and second offences should be duly prosecuted under the law. We've seen that he has cut funding for electronic monitoring of some of the criminals who have committed some serious crimes. We've also seen the fact that he's cut the safer communities fund, which was quite preventative in terms of getting to the source of the issues before they fester to come into the justice system.

I have a feeling that the minister's rejection of this policy is somehow a further indication that this progressive Justice minister with his background is now rejecting the federal tough-on-crime approach. We're seeing it here with his policies in Alberta. You know, we saw a progressive justice policy put forward by Pierre Trudeau. I think Albertans soundly rejected them, and I'd hope that the Justice minister in his new progressive approach isn't bringing those types of principles and policies here to Alberta because I can tell you that Albertans do want a tough-on-crime agenda. They do want to put bad guys in jail.

The fact that he cannot answer what I'd suggest is a relatively simple question – we're not asking for actual numbers. It's stating "estimated projections." The fact that under his leadership his department hasn't actually done the analysis to determine what these projections are is just another indication that I think, you know, this fundamental shifting in justice policy here to a more progressive approach isn't going to work here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I'd hoped that the Justice minister would simply provide the estimated projections so that we know here in Alberta that we will be able to ensure that we have appropriate resources to deal with those increased projections.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Written Question 19 lost]

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

Staffing Details for CFSAs

Q24. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

How many supervisory and front-line staff positions were in each of the child and family services authorities for the

period from January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2011, and what was the funding allocated for salary and wages for supervisory positions compared to front-line staff?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the intent of the question is clear. It's important to understand how trends have changed over the last few years in terms of front-line, on-the-ground care individuals versus administrative and management positions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move an amendment to the question and would then be prepared to accept it with the amendment. The amendment is: be it resolved that Written Question 24 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "for the period from January 1, 2009, to December 31, 2011" and substituting "as of September 30 for each year from 2009 to 2012" and (b) by striking out "was the funding allocated for salary and wages" and substituting "were the salary and wage ranges." The amended question would then read:

How many supervisory and front-line staff positions were in each of the child and family services authorities as of September 30 for each year from 2009 to 2012, and what were the salary and wage ranges for supervisory positions compared to front-line staff?

The reason, of course, for the amendment is that the number of positions is fluid in terms of what positions have been hired to at any particular time and any particular place. I think the hon. member wants to be able to, as he said, measure trends year over year as things happen. I think the way we've rephrased the question will allow us to take a point in time in each year.

If the hon. member wants more information, I can certainly endeavour to do that at more than one point in time, but in the amended motion I'm offering a point in time in each year to discern how many people were employed in each of the child and family services authorities and then what the salary and wage ranges were with respect to the front-line staff. I anticipate being able to provide that information very quickly, but as I say, if that's not responsive to his question in terms of what he needs, I'd be more than happy to have that discussion with him to see whether further information could be provided or provided in a different way. I'm certainly prepared to answer it in this way and then have that discussion about broader information. I would encourage members to accept the amendments.

It would be very difficult to do it on a day-by-day basis through the course of the years, which is what the question as it's currently worded would require us to do. That would take a lot of time and effort, which I'm sure the hon. member hadn't intended. As the question is currently written – I won't go into the detail – it doesn't sort of look for a point in time. It looks for a range, so you'd have to go through day by day to properly answer the question and do that. We've picked a date and said we'd do it once per year on that date, and that gives you the trend lines.

My commitment to the member is that if he wants more, I'm happy to discuss it with him, and we can figure out how to do it in a way that doesn't utilize very important resources inefficiently but gets him the information that he wants.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: To the amendment.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, of course, sir.

I'm actually quite surprised. This seems very reasonable from the government benches. You know, it kind of makes me reflect on a number of other written questions where a similar type of information has been asked for, that have been about date ranges, and they've been rejected by the government because they couldn't provide date ranges. I don't know why a logical, reasonable amendment like this could not have been proposed for a number of those other ones, whether it be the ratios or the number of beds.

That being said, I'm not going to belabour the point. I think that we've made that point quite clear on this side, how we feel about some of those. I think that this written question's amendment is going to provide information that is critical. I hope that the government uses this as a bit of a template for future written questions that are asking for numbers and dates as opposed to just flat out rejecting it, whether it's because you don't want the information to be public or not. I think that this is going to provide information that will be helpful for all of us and for Albertans in general to understand.

I actually want to thank the Minister of Human Services for agreeing to this amendment. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Having listened to the minister, I think it's eminently reasonable to accept the amendment, and I'll discuss with him further some of the finer points, which, I guess, have to do with the disbursement of resources to one or the other sector. I'm still interested in the total amount that is being paid by September to management and the total amount that is being paid to front-line staff even if it's at that point in time, in September.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

I'll call the question, then.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 24 as amended carried]

Reported Abuse of Children in Provincial Care

Q25. **Dr. Swann:**

How many children who have been under the care of the province have been part of a reported situation of abuse, and how many of the reported cases have been substantiated for the fiscal years 2006-2007 through 2011-2012?

Dr. Swann: I do move Written Question 25. I think that's part and parcel of our responsibility as government to assess how our programs are managing, both identifying and getting into proper care, abuse situations, especially if they're under the care of the province. The question is self-evident.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I would welcome the hon. member's question and his concern for the safety and well-being of children under care. I think everyone in this House, in fact all Albertans, should really put a high priority and emphasis on the well-being of children. Unfortunately, there are situations where intentional or nonintentional actions lead to a

child in care being harmed, and we have to work as hard as we can to minimize both of those, actually.

In 2008-2009 the ministry and the office of the Child and Youth Advocate began tracking and publicly reporting on children who experience abuse while in care. This tracking is now being done with consistency across the system. Pre-2008 data is not considered reliable as there was inconsistent usage in interpretation of definitions of abuse and the manner in which data was collected. These issues were resolved when the new system was introduced in 2008.

Begging the hon. member's indulgence, I would like to move that Written Question 25 be amended by striking out "2006-2007" and substituting "2008-2009." The written question as amended would then be:

How many children who have been under the care of the province have been part of a reported situation of abuse, and how many of the reported cases have been substantiated for the fiscal years 2008-2009 through 2011-2012?

Important information, I think, for us to have and to look at, but as I indicated, we don't believe that pre-2008 data is reliable; therefore, a system was put in place to appropriately track this carrying on from that year. The question as amended would provide the information that I think the hon. member would want to have to be able to focus on this issue and to delve further into it. Again, I'd be more than happy to have discussions with him as we go further with this. I think we share a common concern that we need to put our children first. We need to make sure that children are appropriately cared for and, when they are in the care of the province, that there are systems in place which ensure that harm, whether intentional or unintentional, does not befall a child where it can be avoided.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I want to thank the Minister of Human Services for understanding how important this information is for us and for Albertans to get an understanding of what's happening in the child and family services area. I don't have a lot to say other than that we'll certainly be supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just with respect to the amended question I guess I'd like to know the opinion of the mover in terms of what the effect of the amendment will be in the sense that it looks like two years are going to be omitted from the government's response. The rationale is, I think, that the definition of abuse was different back in those years. If the mover would like to answer that, I'd appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We can get that answer, but this will close debate on the amendment.

Hon. Minister of Human Services, if you care to respond.

Mr. Hancock: I don't think there's an opportunity to close debate on the amendment. In any event, he was asking the question of the mover.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, this is your amendment, hon. minister.

Mr. Saskiw: The question is to Calgary-Mountain View.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh. Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your question is to Calgary-Mountain View.

Please proceed.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that we haven't had a consistent definition of abuse for more than four years in this province. I must say: it is what it is. If this government doesn't have reliable statistics before 2008, then so be it. There's no point in trying to dig through data to identify whether the old definition and the new definition are sufficiently similar that we can still make significant conclusions about the trends in abuse in care.

I guess I would accept the amendment at this time with great reluctance.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I think it's safe to call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Back to the motion as amended.

[Written Question 25 as amended carried]

Cost for Residents in Continuing Care Facilities

Q26. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003 to 2011-2012, what was the average annual cost for a resident in long-term, enhanced living, and designated assisted living facilities both in private and not-for-profit facilities respectively?

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm rising on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health. I'm proposing on his behalf that there be an amendment to this written question. I'd allow for copies of the amendment to be circulated while I continue speaking if I may. Thank you. The question would read:

For each of the fiscal years 2009-2010 to 2011-2012, what was the average health care funding per resident per day for long-term care, and what was the average health care funding per resident per day for designated supportive living for 2011-2012?

Information such as the operating costs and the total cost to residents in these settings is not available. Funding information is not available prior to the consolidation of former health regions because the information was not collected in a consistent manner, yet another advantage of going to one region from seven. Work is under way to collect data on actual expenditures going forward. As such, the hon. Minister of Health is able to provide information on health care funding in long-term care and in designated supportive living. Furthermore, the information on the maximum accommodation charges to residents in long-term care settings is available publicly.

I'd ask all members to support this amendment to the written question, and I will take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

To the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm somewhat taken aback by the comments from the Justice minister on the amendments to the written question from the fact that this government is responsible for regulating all long-term care, private care, enhanced living, and designated assisted living facilities in this province. It's somewhat striking to me that they wouldn't have the information

prior to the amalgamation or to Alberta Health Services coming under one umbrella. They are the regulators of these facilities, and you would think that they would be able to explain to the minister, even if it was under the regional health authorities, what the facilities were charging residents at the time. I think the question is very simple. It's the average annual cost for a resident in long-term, enhanced living, and designated assisted living facilities both for private and for nonprofit facilities respectively.

We've had this conversation before, when, quite frankly, we were trying to get any information out of the government in regard to the question that was asked last week on the staffing ratios. I know we've got several FOIP requests out right now, trying to just get some information. It's amazing to me that this somehow seems to be information that the government isn't willing to provide or willing to share. I know my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has probably done the same amount of FOIP requests and had the same questions. I know we as the Wildrose have had written questions like this on the Order Paper over the last couple of years. It just strikes me that the government would not know when they're talking and continually bragging about the fact that there are a thousand continuing care beds that they have every year and about the plans that they have for the seniors in this province. It not only concerns seniors that are in these particular residences, but it could be, you know, folks a lot younger that can't live in a normal setting.

It strikes me, again, that the government does not want to provide this information and is now hiding behind the fact that when we had the regional health authorities, it was different then. Now we're under one umbrella, under Alberta Health Services. As I've said previously, the government is responsible for regulating these facilities, whether they're private or nonprofit.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the amendment?

Dr. Swann: Well, I have to agree with my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek that this really skirts the whole question and the whole purpose of the question. It's one thing to ask about the average annual cost for long-term care in each of those facilities. It's quite another for the government to say: we'll give you the average health funding per person. We would really like to know how the costs have changed and particularly a comparison between private and not-for-profit. That's the whole purpose of the question, and it's entirely sidestepped by the statement that they would give average health care funding per resident for long-term care and for designated assisted living.

I don't understand what the problem is. Even if it is for six years fewer in which they have the data, it's not going to give us answers to the question even in these last two years, which they're offering to give. It's not going to tell us what we actually want to know, which is a comparison of the average cost of long-term, enhanced, and designated assisted living between private and not-for-profit centres. It's a total ignoring of the question, I would have to say, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would tend to agree with my colleagues from Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Fish Creek that part of the original intent of this question was to get an understanding of the difference between private and not-for-profit care and what's being spent there. Again, we go back to a discussion that is very similar to one we had last week. I think that the

government's reluctance to be forthcoming with this information is suggesting that there's something to hide here.

You know, I'm happy to see that they're willing to at least amend the question as opposed to just flat out rejecting it, which has been some of the pattern we'd seen previous to today, but that being said, I think that there is some validity to getting a good understanding of what's happening in the private sector versus what's happened in the not-for-profit. If one is competing with or doing a better job than the other, I think that, again, we should have an understanding of that. If the funding model is different, if the government is providing the exact same, well, great.

It just seems to me a little bit odd that, again, they're withholding information. It's an unfortunate reality, but it's the one that we live in, so I guess we have to take what we're given.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Now back to the motion as amended. Other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Written Question 26 as amended carried]

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

Hospital Occupancy Rates

Q27. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted.

As of January 1, 2010, January 1, 2011, and January 1, 2012, what were the total number of acute-care hospital beds in Alberta that were unoccupied due to limited availability of operational funding?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In other words, over a 12-month period how many beds were available but unstaffed and therefore unavailable for occupancy, leaving some hospitals and some wards overwhelmed largely due to the lack of operational funding?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health, and again I'll try not to beat the dead horse. This is rather simplistic, what we're proposing.

I'm proposing this amendment to the written question, and the pages will circulate them now. May I continue, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Please do.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

The amendment proposes changing the range of dates for which the numbers would be provided, and the question, if the amendment is accepted, Mr. Speaker, would read:

As of March 31, 2010, March 31, 2011, and March 31, 2012, what were the total number of acute-care hospital beds in Alberta that were unoccupied due to limited availability of operational funding?

Changing the date to March 31 reflects the date at which the number of acute beds are reported. I'd ask all members to support this amendment to this written question, and I will take my seat.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, I'm pleased with the amendment, Mr. Speaker. I didn't anticipate that we'd have as much willingness on the part of the government to go back further, so this is a positive amendment. Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Wildrose I also want to thank the government for providing an amendment that we can also accept. It's unfortunate that we couldn't get the same sort of agreement on some of the long-term care and continuing care beds, but by all means this is a very positive step.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Now to the motion as amended. Other speakers?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on the motion as amended.

[Written Question 27 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Nuclear Power

M1. Mr. Hehr:
A return showing copies of all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the period between January 1, 2006, and February 20, 2011.

Public-private Partnership School Designs

M4. Mr. Hehr:
A return showing copies of all communications between Alberta school boards and the Ministry of Infrastructure regarding complaints concerning P3 school design.

Government Aircraft Records

M2. Dr. Swann moved on behalf of Dr. Sherman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all detailed information, including flight records, final destinations, duration of stay, unscheduled stops, and a list of occupants on each flight, however recorded or archived, by electronic means or otherwise, that relates to the operation and usage of any provincially leased or owned aircraft from December 16, 2010, to April 23, 2012.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are rejecting this motion because all of this information is currently available on the website. It would seem to be somewhat of a redundant exercise.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak in favour of this motion. Of course, we have to ensure in this

Assembly that every single tax dollar is spent wisely. This information is about the use of provincially owned or leased aircraft. I know that this information is likely available through FOIP applications, and I'm sure that the leader of the Liberal Party will be processing the appropriate FOIP requests, but if the information is readily available, I think that one should err on the side of full disclosure. We have a Premier that's talked about being open and transparent. If this information is, as the hon. Finance minister says, available on a website, then clearly this information could easily be provided. I'm under the assumption that this motion is actually asking for very detailed information that may not be on the website, including things like unscheduled stops and so forth. In this circumstance I would err on the side of fuller disclosure.

Why this information is, of course, relevant is that there are instances – I know that in my own constituency an MLA flew to my constituency for the opening of a school. It wasn't the Education minister or the Minister of Infrastructure; it was simply an MLA from another constituency. That forced me to of course FOIP the expenditures on that particular flight to garner the amount of wasted taxpayer dollars in that circumstance. Potentially, it could be zero if the plane was already, of course, scheduled and so forth, but it's interesting information to see what kind of taxpayer dollars are being expended on what, I would suggest, would be in that circumstance an unnecessary trip.

So I think that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is simply trying to garner as much information as possible to ascertain whether or not taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely.

4:30

Again, if this information is available, I don't see why the government would just simply reject this motion out of turn. It seems that there's almost the implication that this information should be hidden or something. So I speak in favour of this motion.

Of course, the other important information here, I think, is that we've had a debate on medevac. It'd be interesting to see how much the municipal airport is being used by government planes, planes that are owned by the government, of course, or planes that are leased by the government. I think that information would be relevant and pertinent to the medevac debate. You know, there's been an ongoing debate on how much the municipal airport was used. Of course, during this time period my understanding is that the cabinet ministers – that the provincially owned planes would be almost used exclusively at the downtown airport, so it'd be interesting to see what the numbers are there.

The reason I think the list of occupants on each flight is included in the motion for a return is so that the opposition can ensure that taxpayer dollars are being closely scrutinized so that if there's a particular flight with a particular occupant and that doesn't use taxpayer dollars wisely, we can then put that to the government to ensure that in the future flights are only used for critical core services that the government provides, not as an airplane to use freely just for the sake of using it and it being more convenient. We need to ensure that every single tax dollar is spent wisely. If this information is regularly available during this time period, I would suggest that the government provide it rather than trying to stop the opposition from knowing this information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found that last speech rather astounding from a party and a member who constantly talks

about taxpayers' dollars and respecting taxpayers' dollars, that he would want a motion for a return to have somebody tasked to go through and compile all of this information and put it in written form so that it can be tabled in the House, so that it can be stored in perpetuity in the archives, so that it's available for them, when they can go to the website. On the website it has:

The manifests include the following information:

- When the flights took place;
- Which government aircraft was used;
- Where the flights began and ended;
- The purpose of the trip; and
- Who was aboard.

This is for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013. The information that was requested is on the website. Everything that they've asked for is on the website. The information is publicly available.

For that hon. member to get up and make the speech he did about hiding information, about all that sort of stuff: absolute balderdash. For that hon. member on a day-to-day basis to talk about wasting taxpayers' money and then get up and say, "I'm going to submit FOIP requests," so that some FOIP co-ordinator can spend a lot of time doing his homework for him by going to the website and getting all the information down and copying the pages so that we can bring it in and table it here so that he can have it handy to look at: absolutely absurd, hon. member. You should be ashamed of yourself. This question should be rejected.

You know, written questions and motions for returns are great tools to frame a question, to ask for specific information that may or may not be available, but to put one on that asks for information that's readily available, and they're just too lazy to do the work: that's absolutely absurd.

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

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that the minister of agriculture is returning to the Assembly because I'd like to relate . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: We don't refer to the absence or departure or otherwise of a member. Carry on with your point on the amendment, hon. member, please.

Mr. Strankman: On the 14th of February, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to use a government Dash 8. Through our party I was able to fly down to Calgary on a 37-passenger Dash 8 that flies out of the municipal airport almost on a daily basis. On this day the aircraft flew with 19 bodies out of whatever. At the Western Barley Growers convention I met with other significant members of the opposition who also had taken a government aircraft that day. There are hon. members across – and I think he knows who I'm speaking of – who were also there and attended that same facility. They took a separate aircraft.

The pilots on my aircraft told me when I returned to the hangar at Calgary that those gentlemen had returned. Their aircraft had already left for Edmonton. I had made a personal request to the member opposite to fly on that aircraft. I was denied. Now, maybe the member opposite was going to a different location. I don't specifically know that. But to the gentlemen . . .

Mr. Hancock: Go to the website and find out.

Mr. Strankman: It's not available, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the utility of the Dash 8 is not available on the website. You can find out the passenger manifest. The long-term utility of an aircraft flying at 50 per cent capacity or less is not in

the best interests of the taxpayers of Alberta. Certainly, I've talked to the pilots of that aircraft that I flew with. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please. The Member for Drumheller-Stettler has the floor. Thank you.

On the question, hon. member, please.

Mr. Strankman: It's my understanding that these aircrafts are not being used to the utility that they're required for the taxpayers' dollars, and the method to find out this information is not available to taxpayers. That's the reason I'm in favour of this motion. I've had personal experience with the use of these aircraft, recent experience. That's what I wish to tell you about, Mr. Speaker, that it's not available.

When the medevac flights go to the International, there's going to be the movement of the same transport department. I don't know if those expenses are going to be allowed to be rolled into the file required to find out information. Under the Results-based Budgeting Act I don't know that there's been a review posted either for the use of these taxpayers' dollars in this function.

So I would like to vote in favour of this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand up and debate this motion because I've been on that side, and I know the frequency of the government plane both as a cabinet minister and a private member and now as a member of the opposition. I understand what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is saying in regard to the manifest and what's available online. What isn't available online is the room that's available.

I would like to talk, from a personal view, about when the members for Calgary-Mountain View and Edmonton-Meadowlark – the Member for Calgary-Mountain View may recall this – and I had been asked to attend a health debate back sometime that was being televised both in Edmonton and Calgary. The members for Edmonton-Meadowlark, Calgary-Mountain View, and I tried to get on the government plane, and we were told it was full. We were attending the same debate as the Minister of Health at that particular time. We're off scrambling, trying to get onto a regular flight, which, quite frankly, is quite costly to the taxpayers. The same thing when we tried to go back: the flight was full.

We've had this discussion in our caucus. For some of us that come from southern Alberta, quite frankly, the roads can be a little treacherous at times. And the flight is always full. For us it's important to find out exactly what flights are available. I know when I was a government member flying up sometimes on Sunday nights or Monday mornings on the government plane and also flying back Thursdays at – I forget – I think it was 6 o'clock, there are times that they make space available on whatever plane they're going to use depending on how many members are on that particular government flight. There is always – I would suggest 90 per cent of the time – room available.

So while some of that is what the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has said, that it's available on the website, I think that probably if you read the motion to its fullest, it says:

. . . a copy of all detailed information, including flight records, final destinations, duration of stay, unscheduled stops, and a list of occupants on each flight, however recorded or archived, by electronic means or otherwise, that relates to the operation and usage of any provincially leased or owned aircraft from December 16, 2010, to April 23, 2012.

4:40

Well, it's all well and good to brag about what is available on those flights. I remember that the previous member for Rocky Mountain House, who was actually the Minister of Transportation at that time, was quite agreeable in regard to posting some of this information.

So I think that if you look at the motion in whole, it will be quite revealing on how many times planes have come back deadheaded. You might have a plane where you're only travelling with two or three people. I think the government has to remember that this is a plane owned by the taxpayers of this province. They would like to see some accountability for some of this. I think if they want to brag about what they do post on the website, the rest of the information can also be posted.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as I sat back listening to the hon. Government House Leader in his little tirade there, I just flipped open the unparliamentary language section of *Beauchesne's*, and I found probably at least four or five different indications where unparliamentary language was clearly used. I think if you were to go back and read the Blues, you would see that as well.

I'm not going to stand up and talk to the motion. I just simply want to put forward that, you know, it was a rather unfortunate use of language that the hon. Government House Leader chose. I think that it's an unfortunate piece of that debate. [interjections] I'm sorry. What was that?

An Hon. Member: Raise a point of order, then.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I appreciate the option to do that. You know, I couldn't find them quite quick enough to raise the point of order, but thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the motion?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

Swan Hills In Situ Coal Gasification Project

M3. Dr. Swann moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports, studies, financial forecasts, and any other materials prepared for Alberta Energy on the Swan Hills in situ coal gasification power project and the associated carbon capture and storage project.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion for a return, as the hon. member has indicated, asks for documentation on the Swan Hills in situ gasification power project. In fact, I have consulted with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – we had a very pleasant chat – and the information specific to carbon capture and storage particular to coal gasification will be directly provided to the member in the very near future.

It's also really my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that the member was looking for information to confirm or to better understand that CCS is indeed an appropriate use of taxpayers' dollars. Of course, we're all interested in that topic. I'm sure this will help people understand that circumstance. So because of the importance of

this, I will also be making the same information public and available electronically.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, my door is always open to members of all sides of the House to provide information as requested.

I move at this point as a technicality to reject the motion.

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

Mr. Hale: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak in favour of this motion for a return. There are many questions that I feel need to be answered. There was a news release that the Alberta government put out saying that at this time it didn't meet the scope of the government's funding requirements. I would actually like to know what those funding requirements are for CCS.

You know, \$285 million has now been postponed, and it has not been reallocated, what they're going to do with that \$285 million. Just throwing it out there that maybe that could be put in the minister of agriculture's fund. That would take care of that 6 cents a litre for about eight years for the Alberta farmers that produce the food for our great province if they are looking for somewhere to go with that money. There is nothing that says what that money is going to be used for now.

The gasification of this coal underground to produce this synthetic gas: it's been mentioned that they would like to see gas at \$5 a gigajoule. Currently it's quite a bit below that. So what is the funding? You know, is \$5 a trigger? If it is, then what are their projections for how long it will take to get into that range of \$5? We've heard it could be many, many years before it's \$5 again.

There's quite a bit of information that could be presented. I'm happy to hear the hon. Energy minister say that his door is always open. Again, he's been very forthcoming with myself, you know, meeting and answering some questions, and I like to hear that. But I think that it could be made a little bit more public, some of this information.

What is the total cost of the carbon capture and storage for this project? If the government is putting in \$285 million, what's the total cost of that? How much money is the company going to be putting in? What is the trigger that actually makes it worth while? Is it \$5 just to cover that \$285 million, or is it \$5 a gigajoule to cover the total expense, and how much profit is going to be made after all their expenses? That's something I would like to find the answers to.

So, you know, I would like to stand in favour of this return. Obviously, from the Energy minister's statements, he will not be tabling this return, so I guess he can look forward to a visit from myself in the near future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there others?

Would the mover like to close? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I guess I was a little confused by the minister's response. At first I thought he was planning to provide the information, and then he indicated that he wasn't prepared to honour the motion for a return and, instead, will be tabling it at some future date. I guess that's the same as responding to the motion for a return.

It's clearly something that is on the minds and, obviously, in the budgets of our government. We need to know all that we can, and I guess we'll come back afterwards, then, with further questions depending on what information we receive.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member
I'll call the question.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Calgary Buffalo.

School Fees Details

M5. Dr. Swann moved on behalf of Mr. Hehr that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of the fees charged to parents by each of Alberta's 62 school boards for each of the school years from September 2009 to June 2012.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure again to rise. This is obviously trying to get at some of the increased costs for families associated with fees that are meant to make up the difference between what school boards are receiving from government and what they're forced to garner from parents. It's a recurring question that, I guess, many of us have about when the government is going to adequately fund our public education system and ensure that we're not nickel and diming or indeed severely compromising some individuals, especially those of few means, in our school system. So I look forward to hearing the minister's response.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are a number of things in the question that would beg for comment with respect to whether you can actually tell what the hon. member was asking from the information. Just because school boards are charging fees does not necessarily mean that the system is underfunded. In fact, we have one of the best if not the best funded education system in the country and, I might say, the best results in the country if not in the English-speaking world, as some, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, would believe. However, the question of school fees has become an issue in the last few years. Now, school fees are within the purview of the school boards, and we should be very clear on that. There's a range of areas in which they can set fees and collect fees.

We are prepared to provide information where we have it. I would ask that this motion be amended so it can be answered by the Minister of Education, and I would propose the amendment read: be it resolved that Motion for a Return 5 be amended by striking out "for each of the school years from September 2009 to June 2012" and substituting "for the 2011-2012 school year as collected by the department." The amended motion for a return would then read as follows:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of the fees charged to parents by each of Alberta's 62 school boards for the 2011-2012 school year as collected by the department.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, school fees are the purview of the school boards. This return as moved requests school fee data from September '09 to '12, so for essentially three school years. The department only has detailed information on school fees charged by the boards for the 2011-12 year simply because we never collected that data from school boards previously. That was entirely within their purview and their authority to do. We did collect it in 2011, however, in response to a specific request by the previous Minister of Education, so that information is in hand and

available. If the members would like to have information with respect to the other school years, they can do exactly what we would have to do, and that is contact the school boards and get the information.

I would ask that the amendment be passed so that we can provide the information that we have and so that we do not have to, again using taxpayers' dollars, go out and collect other information, which is available to them, from those other jurisdictions. If it's that important and relevant to them, that's a process they could undertake. It's not one that I would suggest we should have Department of Education officials use their time to do. They have the information. They're working on a go-forward basis on the whole issue of school fees. The issue of school fees is important to people.

Certainly, on a provincial basis we now have the 2011-2012 data available. It wouldn't, I would suggest, be in anybody's best interest to set up a make-work project to go back and collect the historical data which we don't have.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

On the amendment? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak against the amendment. Of course, the elimination of school fees was one of the main components of our campaign. At the doors we received lots of favouritism for this, a lot of parents feeling that there were a lot of extra costs. There were some hard times with affordability for some of the parents. There was a lot of discussion that in a system such as ours it was an unnecessary burden on a lot of lower income families.

With the question specifically, though, I like how the hon. member had it worded, how it was going to show the difference between each of Alberta's 62 school boards for what they were collecting, rather than the way the government has proposed in the amendment, as collected by the department. From what I've been hearing in Cypress-Medicine Hat, it almost seems like no two schools, no two school boards are the same. They all charge different amounts. Some force them to collection agencies; some don't. Some tie up tons and tons of administrators' time in phoning parents for the fees, chasing bounced cheques, explaining why these work.

Surely to goodness it would be beneficial to the 87 of us in here to see how this information relates to all 62 school boards, to see how the enforcement works, and maybe to see how it's tied to the results of each of these schools. Again, because of the situation where all the different school boards have the ability – and there are certainly a lot of strengths in that – to charge different amounts, let's see where it's working.

I'll tell you an interesting story on almost a personal basis. I have a grade 7 son who plays basketball, three baskets last game. There's a school in my constituency where a lot of Mennonite people have moved into the school, and the teachers and the people involved have been doing tremendous work getting these kids involved. The kids are playing on the basketball team, getting more and more involved in the school as time goes by, and large parts of this are working. But one of the interesting things that was discussed was that when the issue of fees were charged to some of these kids, it became a real roadblock, a real difference in culture, a real difference of opinion, a real difference in the value of school and in some cases the value of athletics.

Again, in my opinion, in this day and age of shared technology, in this day and age of shared information, this would be very, very valuable information for all the 62 school boards to share and for

the 87 of us in here to have access to to debate these motions. For that reason, I speak against the government's amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Now back to the motion as amended. Are there other speakers?

[Motion for a Return 5 as amended carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Public Funding for Private Schools

M6. Dr. Swann moved on behalf of Mr. Hehr that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all government studies on the impact of reducing public funding to private schools.

Dr. Swann: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. For the final push I think the intent is evident that we on this side believe that there's an inordinate amount of money going to private schools that should be invested in the public system to ensure that they have maintenance issues dealt with and that children's education is in a suitable environment.

I'll take my seat and allow debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education I would urge the House to reject this question. Alberta is recognized for providing one of the best education systems in the world. It's a system that's built on a range of educational choices, including public, separate, charter, francophone, and private schools. Students consistently perform among the best in Canada and around the world, and accredited private schools have officially been part of that and have officially been recognized in Alberta since 1946 and have received some form of public funding since 1967.

Accredited private schools are funded at either 60 per cent or 70 per cent of the base instructional operational funding for public and separate schools, and they do not receive capital funding or a number of differential grants such as transportation, class size, small schools by necessity, to name a few. To qualify for government funding, private schools must be accredited by the Ministry of Education and must meet a specific set of expectations. Accredited funded private schools must follow the Alberta programs of study and must employ Alberta-certificated teachers. Additionally, the schools are required to prepare and regularly update three-year education plans and annual education results reports.

Private schools are providing Alberta kids and their parents with educational options, and for this reason we believe that they are an important part of the choice that should be celebrated, not condemned. The Alberta government has not done a study on the impact of reducing public funding to private schools and is not considering doing one. Therefore, again, I would encourage the rejection of the motion.

I might say, though, that it doesn't take much analysis to understand that if you stop funding private schools, and therefore the attendance numbers at private schools goes down and the attendance numbers at public schools goes up, there would be

more public money required to fund that because we fund on a per-student basis and we fund a hundred per cent of the public schools and we fund transportation grants, etc. . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. Government House Leader, but the time for the consideration of this matter has expired.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Fiscal Policy Legislation

506. Mr. Anderson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation which would do the following: limit spending increases to no more than population growth plus inflation, prohibit the introduction of a budget that proposes a cash deficit, allocate half of all cash surpluses to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and amend the appropriate legislation to suspend the practice of spending the interest generated by the fund until it reaches an amount of at least \$200 billion.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to introduce private member's Motion 506 at a time in our province's history when an assessment about the government's record of fiscal management could not be more important. Two weeks ago Premier Redford . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we don't refer to members by name.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, sorry. My bad.

Two weeks ago the Premier introduced her 2013 back-in-debt budget. It was our province's sixth deficit in a row and a damning indictment of this PC government's recent fiscal mismanagement. Budget 2013 was where all the irresponsible PC election promises collided with reality, leaving a trail of broken promises and affirming the warnings of so many who said that the projections in last year's budget were borderline hallucinogenic. But the dire situation revealed in Budget 2013 did not just start last year. It is the culmination of a long-standing lack of concerted and consistent fiscal discipline.

Although left-wing politicians, including most of the PC MLAs opposite, claim that the problem stems from a lack of provincial revenue, the opposite is, in fact, true. The Alberta government has a spending problem. Unlike some human beings, numbers don't lie. The majority of the last two decades have brought annual record revenues flowing into the provincial treasury. Because of the fiscal restraint shown by Albertans during the '90s, our province was able to eliminate a \$23 billion debt albatross taken on by former Premier Getty while posting 13 consecutive provincial surpluses of more than a billion dollars a year.

Then came the years of excess. In the last 10 years preceding this budget, the Alberta government increased spending by 100 per cent. That's double the rate of inflation plus population growth. The Premier's first budget increased operating expenses at a staggering rate of 6.9 per cent, or \$2.4 billion. Economists, policy analysts, advocates, and commentators have long warned of the peril in the government's robust increases in year-over-year spending since 2005. The provincial government has been repeatedly advised that continuing to ramp up spending at the rate of the past several years was unsustainable and would quickly

deplete all of our savings, and they were right. In 2008 our province had almost no debt and a \$17 billion rainy-day fund. By election 2016 we'll have a \$17 billion debt and no rainy-day fund.

This sorry state of affairs is bound to happen when one party has been in power for more than four decades and has failed to implement or maintain rules to ensure fiscal discipline and responsible management. Balanced budgets and refraining from debt are not ends in and of themselves, but they are critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability of core social programs that are important to Albertans. Balanced budgets and responsible surplus management ensure that we fulfill our responsibility to future generations, ensuring that the opportunities for prosperity are even greater for them than what we enjoy today. It is up to us to take the torch, to grow the Alberta advantage to new heights, and then pass that torch to others after a job well done. Sadly, we are not fulfilling that duty. It is time to start, and we can do so by passing and implementing Motion 506 today.

The first part of Motion 506 limits annual government spending increases to no more than the rate of population growth plus inflation. Every day Alberta families make responsible spending decisions to make ends meet and save money for their future. By limiting spending increases in this manner, the government will be able to sustain core social programs and preserve funding for infrastructure, municipalities, and front-line workers such as nurses, teachers, and social workers, all the while balancing the books and having money left over to save for the future.

Some of those over on the other side may recall that I advocated for this spending restraint role while still a PC MLA. I remember the former Treasury Board president being irate with me because I dared to challenge him in question period as a government backbencher on the issue. I followed that up with a private member's bill calling for this legislated spending cap, which was soundly defeated by the PC majority. I was told I was being too inflexible, that everything would work out. Well, guess what? Everything did not work out. I'm not happy about being able to say that I told you so, but here it is. If this government had held spending increases to inflation plus population growth since just 2005, Mr. Speaker, the last six deficit budgets would have all been surpluses. Instead, our \$17 billion rainy-day fund is gone, and we are staring at \$17 billion in debt by election 2016. Those who allowed this to happen should be absolutely ashamed.

People often ask: what spending would you have forgone since 2008, for example? Easy. We would have cut all corporate welfare grants, and that would have saved us billions of dollars. We would have shrunk the size of what we spend on AHS and government bureaucracy by 20 per cent, saving billions more. We would have held the line on front-line wages to cost-of-living increases. We would have shrunk the number of government managers to workers from 4 to 1 down to 10 to 1. We would have cut cabinet and MLA pay, forgone Olympic-size junkets, mothballed a \$300 million new MLA Taj Mahal, and ended the long line of patronage appointments to friends of the government family. In short, we would have spent the money where Albertans needed it instead of where the PCs wanted it.

Motion 506 also asks the government to "prohibit the introduction of a budget that proposes a cash deficit," starting in Budget 2014. Although the Wildrose has offered a balanced budget alternative since 2010, the fiscal mess the PCs have us in today will necessitate now a two-year plan to get us back into balance without the need to cut front-line services, positions, and salaries, as we promised during the 2012 election. Unlike the governing party, this party keeps its promises. This government has thrown out Ralph Klein's no-deficit and no-debt law. A Wildrose government would bring it back.

Then there's the issue of savings. This government has proved itself to be the most incompetent fiscal regime in our province's and potentially our nation's history. We know that in 2008 our province had almost no debt and a \$17 billion rainy-day fund. By 2016 we will have a \$17 billion debt and no rainy-day fund. The recent treatment of the heritage fund, established by Premier Lougheed, that was meant to save enough of our resource wealth so that future generations wouldn't have to rely on oil and gas forever – this visionary plan has been the most neglected of all. What has transpired instead has been nothing short of intergenerational theft. The heritage fund, when adjusted for inflation, is worth less today than in 1976, when Lougheed created it. Think about how disgusting that is. It would be worth roughly \$137 billion today had the annual interest, just the interest, earned since 1986 been left in the fund to grow without the need of investing even one more cent of resource revenue. Instead, it was spent, all of it squandered, wasted. The fund is worth only \$16.4 billion today. What a waste.

I'm glad to see that the importance of growing the heritage fund finally seems to be on the government's radar, but the government's plan to borrow billions each year just to save a few million in the heritage fund is entirely counterproductive to becoming financially independent. Wildrose will not allow the heritage fund to continue to be squandered. Motion 506 says that upon the budget being balanced, we would legislate a rule to allocate half of all cash surpluses to the heritage fund. We would then also "amend the appropriate legislation to suspend the practice of spending the [annual] interest generated by the fund until it reaches an amount of at least \$200 billion." There is no time to lose. I am not willing to look my children and grandchildren in the eye 20 years from now and try to explain how this generation was too incompetent, too selfish, too morally bankrupt to even save a small fraction of our nonrenewable wealth so they can keep the core services and job-friendly environment we enjoy long after the day of massive oil wealth has passed.

As the Official Opposition the Wildrose understands that we must propose solutions and demonstrate how we would do things differently. We have put forward robust policy proposals during the past three years in our 100-plus page caucus policy green book, in our annual alternative balanced budgets, in this year's Wildrose financial recovery plan, in the 10-year debt-free capital plan, and in a series of pledges to Albertans during the last election. I would suggest that no opposition party in our province's history has offered more concrete, proactive solutions than we have, and we are very proud of that. Most of all, Wildrose will be guided by our number one motivation, Albertans. We will continue to work hard every day to make this province a better place for our neighbours, our children, and our grandchildren for decades to come.

I ask that my fellow members pass this motion immediately and get to work implementing it in legislation for all Albertans now and tomorrow. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, there's a lot of political hyperbole and, I would say, some fairly insulting language in a lot of what was said there. Let me get to the basics of this. I appreciate that the hon. member has come up with some constructive ideas, many of which actually have been considered or suggested in past reviews of Alberta's fiscal framework. In fact, the results of the government's most recent review of the framework are actually contained in Bill 12, the new Fiscal

Management Act, which is currently before the House. With that proposed legislation and Budget 2013 the points that have been raised in this motion are actually no longer needed.

The motion proposes that spending increases be limited by law to no more than population growth plus inflation. Mr. Speaker, the budget that we currently have before us in this House holds the line on spending. The rate of growth in operating expenses is zero per cent in 2013-14, well below the estimated 4.3 per cent rate of population growth plus inflation. While population plus inflation can be considered as an important consideration, we don't believe that it's a measure that should be mandatory.

5:10

Limiting spending increases based on these factors is far too simplistic and inflexible, especially in a province like ours, Mr. Speaker, where growth is inevitable. We are growing at a tremendous rate. Population plus inflation doesn't take into account the demographics or other pertinent factors. For example, the demand for social programs and growth in the number of seniors accessing health care and seniors' programs isn't equal to population growth. Enrolment growth in early childhood to grade 12 or postsecondary education is unlikely to be the same either.

While we do consider population growth and general inflation as we develop budget targets, legislating this would be problematic. I do recall the hon. member having discussions in our caucus about whether or not we should legislate a cap on spending, but we have growth in our province, Mr. Speaker. We have people coming here because we have jobs. That's not to say that the government shouldn't rein in spending, and as shown by this current budget, we currently are doing that. We're doing this by putting our house in order first and taking a very careful look at our spending because it's the right thing to do. We have had to make some tough but thoughtful decisions with Budget 2013. We're also continuing to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of our programs and services through results-based budgeting.

We're freezing MLA and management pay and reducing the number of public-sector managers by 10 per cent. The hon. members across the way talk a lot about: they're going to cut 20 per cent of the management in government. You could get rid of all of the managers in the GOA, Mr. Speaker, and it would save you half a billion dollars this year. But what do you do next year? No managers. No growth.

We successfully negotiated a deal with the teachers that sees three years of zero increases, Mr. Speaker. We're holding the line, and we're living within our means because it's the right thing to do, not because it's been legislated. We were elected to make those decisions by the people of Alberta.

Another proposal from the motion is the prohibition of the introduction of a budget that proposes a cash deficit. Mr. Speaker, the proposed Fiscal Management Act legislates that the operational budget can only be in deficit if there are sufficient funds in the contingency account to offset it. I take a bit of an issue when the hon. member said – and his leader said this, too – that the rainy-day fund is going to be gone in three years, that it's going to be – poof – gone, disappeared. I guess they're not really looking at the column which shows that the balance at the end of the year in 2016 is more than 4 and a half billion dollars. The balance of total savings for the province of Alberta is more than \$24 billion. Hardly poof, but I guess they're having difficulty reading financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, we're also in that projecting an operational deficit of \$451 million. That's true, and it's a great concern to us. We're withdrawing the funds from the contingency account to deal with

that, and that's exactly what the contingency account was set up to do. It was to provide short-term fiscal stabilization.

I'd also like to remind members that Alberta is in a net asset position, the only province in Canada to be in that position, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our net asset position will grow over the next three years to \$44 billion. The legislation that was previously before the House, which had the definitions in section 2, that the hon. member was waving at me yesterday, was all about the change in net assets for the province. That's the definition that was used previously. Now, we're going to use that, and we're going to use the operational deficit or surplus to show Albertans exactly what's happening in their operating and their capital and their savings.

Lastly, the motion suggests allocating half of all cash surpluses to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Interesting concept, Mr. Speaker. It would also require the fund to retain all interest earned by the fund until it reaches at least \$200 billion. Two hundred billion. What happens if there are no cash surpluses? What do they do then?

Bill 12, on the other hand, will take an annual portion of nonrenewable resource revenue right off the top – right off the top – before it's even considered for use in expenditures and place those funds into savings, Mr. Speaker, because that's what Albertans told us they wanted us to do, save in the good times and in the challenging times, and Bill 12 does that. So our savings will be driven by our revenue intake and aren't dependent on running surpluses. That means we're going to save both in the good times and in the challenging times, as I said, and it's going to reduce our reliance on nonrenewable resources, just as Albertans told us that they want us to do.

Bill 12 also retains an increasing portion of the heritage savings trust fund's net income, and on that we agree. That's why we put it in there. That's why it's in this budget, Mr. Speaker. By 2017-18 a hundred per cent – a hundred per cent – of the fund's net income will be retained for our future generations, which I'm sure the hon. member will agree is a good thing.

The act also doesn't prevent us from adding additional amounts into those savings, Mr. Speaker. The government knows how important savings are, and we will add more money when we are able to do so, money beyond what's legislated in the act.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the changes being made to the fiscal framework in Bill 12 provide more flexibility to deal with actual spending pressures that arise. We've seen some of those in the past years. You know what? This government continued to maintain its capital spending through some very, very difficult times, that kept 80,000 Albertans at work, that built the infrastructure that Albertans need, including the schools that this hon. member talks about. That's what Albertans wanted us to do.

I don't know if you know this, Mr. Speaker, but I'm a grandfather. I'm actually a proud grandfather of three grandsons, and probably about 10 years from now they're going to need some schools to go to, in less than 10 years, actually. I want them to be able to go to school, and in the future their parents will pay for schools, too. Their parents will pay for roads and hospitals and all those other things that we're building today. That's why Bill 12 is important. It sets the fiscal framework so that my grandkids are going to have schools to get into in the next few years, not wait for when we have some sort of cash accounting voodoo that they're doing over there, that they can build it in cash.

Mr. Speaker, this new act that we've introduced into the House, Bill 12, limits the ability to have operational deficits and takes money off the top to cover our debt-servicing costs and our savings. It implements a strict savings plan that in some ways goes

beyond the steps that are proposed in this motion. So I cannot support this motion because Bill 12 is better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and speak to Motion 506, put forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie. I just want to indicate that I'll be saving my comments on Bill 12 for the actual Bill 12 debate and avoid getting into, you know, a comparison between a bad plan and a worse one, but I do want to put on record some of the views of the NDP with respect to the motion that has been put forward by the Wildrose opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to say is that this particular motion unduly restricts the tools available to government to manage economic growth and budgets of the province of Alberta and in doing so, I think, will create far more problems than it solves.

5:20

For example, the limitation on spending increases to no more than population growth plus inflation makes sense as a good policy to be followed most of the time, but by placing it into legislation, as the Wildrose would like, it locks the government in, and there may be times, particularly when you're anticipating rapid growth in the future, when you need to spend in order to be prepared for that growth in terms of infrastructure or the training of people in universities and technical institutions and so on. There are lots of reasons why you may want to ramp up your spending in a certain year or a certain period in order to prepare for circumstances that you may see developing in the future. So that's, I think, a significant problem.

I guess the second thing that I have to say about this is that the Wildrose financial plan that was released the other day doesn't meet the criteria that are set out in this motion. I think that's a difficulty, Mr. Speaker, that needs to be dealt with. The Wildrose financial recovery plan would not be legal if legislation as proposed by the Wildrose was in fact passed. For example, the Wildrose budget contained cash deficits in 2013 of \$2.75 billion and \$2 billion in 2012. If the Wildrose had taken into account the interest generated by the heritage fund, which is expected to contribute over \$1.07 billion to the general revenue of the province, then their cash deficit for 2013 would be \$3.82 billion. So there's a pretty big mistake in the budget.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You're calling a point of order?

Mr. Anderson: Point of order. Absolutely.

The Deputy Speaker: Citation, hon. member.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Clearly, we're not supposed to impute false motives or say things that should be disparaging about other people in this House, Mr. Speaker. I would have the hon. member know . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please, so we can hear the member.

Mr. Anderson: I know you're excited over there. You're so cute when you get excited.

I want that member to very clearly know that we have to have our motions in several months previous to the budget coming down, to today. [interjections] Well, you're imputing a false motive. You can't call a point of order, genius, on a point of order.

In other words, we had to have our motion in before we saw the budget. Therefore, we could not change the motion. We tried, but we were not allowed to change the motion to reflect what was in our alternative budget, which came, of course, just last week. Just for a point of clarification on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I'll have the hon. member respond to the point of order called.

Mr. Mason: Yes. In my experience in this House, Mr. Speaker – and I've been the recipient of points of order, and I've dished them out as well, even won a few – nowhere in 23(h), (i), and (j) does it refer to simple arithmetic as impugning motives.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has covered it. There is no point of order. It shouldn't have even been risen as a point of order given the fact that the hon. member admitted that all he was doing was standing to try to correct what is obviously a mistake in their math. Whether it came in before or not is irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that their planned document that they purport to be a budget does have about a \$3 billion hole in it, and they haven't really figured that out yet. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is right.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, we're discussing a motion here, and this motion is dealing with a subject that, depending on interpretation, may or may not refer to other matters that are before the House: the budget, a certain act, and timing. Certainly, any suggestion that one could anticipate or will anticipate what this House might do in terms of how we deal with the budget, for that matter, or the piece of legislation that refers to some of the matters referred in the motion – really, I think we should allow members the opportunity to debate this motion. I can't find where you're stretching for a point of order, hon. member. I'm sorry. I hope we can carry on and get some good debate on your motion.

With your indulgence, I'll ask the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to continue, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that very much. Now, the Wildrose plan states that a hundred per cent of the interest generated by the heritage savings trust fund must be put back into the fund. In 2013 the government of Alberta estimates that interest from the fund will contribute \$1.07 billion. That means that if it was taken to a consideration, the 2013 Wildrose alternative budget has a consolidated cash deficit of \$3.82 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this comes to my point, which I made earlier during question period last week, that we have the Progressive Conservatives, on the one hand, with a \$5.2 billion deficit, the Wildrose now with something approaching \$4 billion if you do the math, and we have between them the deficit twins. Now, why is that? What else do they have in common? They also have in common a defence of the Ralph Klein tax cuts that were made

when royalties were very high for natural gas, for example, \$8 billion a year. Of course, the corporate tax rate has been cut from 16 to 10 per cent, with an objective of eventually getting to 8, and the flat tax, of course, also cost billions of dollars in revenue by handing tax breaks to the wealthiest Albertans. At the same time middle class families are paying more in taxes than they do in some other provinces as a result.

Since both parties refuse to force the wealthy or the corporate sector to pay their fair share, we are overly dependent on royalty revenue. That's the problem, and this motion doesn't get at it any more than the government's bill does or the government's budget. Because both parties are parties that are beholden to very, very powerful and wealthy corporate interests in this province, they refuse to deal with the underlying cause of the problem, which is that we are far too dependent on volatile royalty resource revenue.

This was something that was pointed out by the Emerson report, which was established by former Premier Stelmach, and made its report in 2011. I was present at the Alberta Research Park release of the report. I listened very carefully, and I read the report carefully. They warned the government that this could happen, that this was a risk, and others have said the same thing. Peter Lougheed certainly has talked about this as well. We have a situation where the government doesn't take in enough reliable tax revenue because of these inconsistencies and imbalances in the overall tax rates in the province, so we're too dependent on royalty revenues that are very, very volatile. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we're in the position where every time the price of oil drops in this province, we're laying off teachers and nurses. Frankly, we can do a lot better than that, but this government has stubbornly refused to deal with the situation.

Lougheed also talked about saving. Now, the government and the Wildrose both have some savings plans, but here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. When we use royalty revenue from a nonrenewable resource to pay for our current program expenditures, we are robbing our children and our grandchildren of their birthright. We need to move to a position where all of the expenditures for program expenditures in this province are financed strictly from tax revenue and not from royalty revenue. Unless the Wildrose and the PC parties are prepared to deal with that, they will remain the parties of cuts and deficits.

The difference between them, Mr. Speaker, is that one wants more debt and the other wants more cuts, but they both are offering up plenty of both. That is not where the NDP wants to go. The NDP wants to make sure that everyone pays their fair share so that we can fund reliable and steady public services that the people of this province want and deserve and that we can put aside the royalty revenues that we're getting, which are much too low, in our view, into a plan that will actually ensure that in the future we have plentiful wealth in this province to enjoy the kind of standard of living and quality of life that we would like.

5:30

This plan was originally proposed by Peter Lougheed when he was the Premier. He was a Progressive Conservative but very different from the ones we see today and certainly different from the Wildrose as well. He proposed that we should be saving for the future in a very systematic way. Interestingly, the only country in the world that paid attention to what Peter Lougheed said and to the six principles that he established was the country of Norway, and we had the ambassador of Norway visit us today. Norway has successfully invested their proceeds from North Sea oil in a fund that now exceeds \$600 billion, and they invest it very carefully. They don't invest it in their own country because they don't want to fuel inflation and overheat the economy. They invest it in other parts of the world.

Norway has seen a tremendous increase in its standard of living and in its quality of life, Mr. Speaker. That's the direction that we believe we should go, but unless we get full value on our royalties, unless oil companies and wealthy Albertans pay their fair share, we'll never get there.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join the discussion, and I would like to support the motion as proposed, especially its three parts: limiting spending increases, the prohibition of a cash deficit, and a more thought-out plan on saving money for our heritage trust fund, something that we all know hasn't happened since 1976, when Peter Lougheed originally put the \$15 billion or \$16 billion away, a plan that includes saving and not borrowing to save. Many, many Albertans that I've talked to find it incomprehensible that the idea of borrowing to save is somehow going to make sense for us in the long run.

Like the grandfather across the floor, I too want to leave the province in better shape for my kids and my grandkids, and that does not mean huge tax increases. That does not mean huge inefficiencies. That means us doing our best job to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money.

I kind of wanted to take a look at where we're at now. In the last 10 years the PC government has doubled – doubled – spending, double what population increase and inflation have been. This has Alberta, a supposedly Conservative province, on a per capita basis outspending Liberal Ontario, outspending socialist Manitoba and Nova Scotia, and even outspending on a per capita basis separatist Quebec.

Does it matter? Well, the authors of the Macdonald-Laurier report six months ago said that it matters, when, incredibly, they said that Alberta because of our inefficient spending, because of our overreliance on oil and gas royalties, and because of our demographics was the most likely province to default on our debt someday. Absolutely incredible: defaulting on debt that at that point we didn't have.

There's also a strong belief, in my mind and in businesspeople's minds, that the type of jurisdiction that investors, people that provide labour, and hard-working small-business people look for is a jurisdiction where they can confidently put their assets, their time, and their money to work without the fear of unfair increased taxation, without the possibility of huge waste. In today's news is a very interesting story about what people will do when they feel the threat of taxation and the possibility of a 6.75 to a 10 per cent tax on bank accounts in Cyprus. That has created a huge run that may bring the entire European Union down, if you can imagine.

I mentioned that our government spends more per capita than Liberal Ontario. I mentioned that one of the parts I really like about our Member for Airdrie's motion is to limit the spending increases. Why does it matter? It matters because Ontario has not limited their spending increases and has not limited their debt. Ontario at this point in time has no strict limits on debt, and the debt has shot up while their economy since 1990-1991 has grown 133 per cent. Over the same time period of approximately 13 or 14 years, when the economy grew 133 per cent, debt grew an amazing 571 per cent. Imagine. Imagine the loss in services, the loss in programs, what this is costing the Ontario citizen, the Ontario taxpayer, and the Ontario economy.

As a matter of fact, Ontario right now is spending \$10 billion a year on interest. They only – only – spend \$9.7 billion on postsecondary and training, less than their interest on their debt. Three years from now, when Alberta is estimated to be \$17 billion

in the hole, we'll be spending some side of \$600 million in debt. How many schools can we build for that? How many hospitals can we build for that? How many roads can we build for that?

Sitting here listening to the whole issue about what the Wildrose wants to do for building and our 10-year debt-free capital plan, I sat back and found it very, very amazing that our plan includes almost \$50 billion over 10 years, has a start this year spending \$4.2 billion and rising by inflation and population growth. When I look at the government's capital plan, I see as well that they are reducing from \$5.2 billion to \$4.8 billion to \$4.6 billion, spending almost identical, Mr. Speaker, to what the Wildrose will be spending three years from now. I find that part of the argument quite humorous.

Interestingly enough, in some of the reading that I was doing to get prepared for the Member for Airdrie's motion today, it talked about the comparison between California and Ontario. California is maybe not considered one of the most fiscally shining examples out there, but amazingly the Fraser report from this January says that Ontario's total debt for 2010-2011 was \$237 billion compared to California's, with a several times bigger economy, at only \$143 billion, almost half of what Ontario's is. Why did that happen? California differs from Ontario because it has strict limits on how much debt the state can accumulate. My goodness, very, very similar to what our Member for Airdrie is saying.

In the few minutes I have left, I want to talk about the third part of the member's motion, and that's accumulating some side of \$200 billion in the fund, where we will have, we being our kids and our grandkids and future Albertans, approximately \$10 billion a year for programs, for services that we all cherish and we all want to support. I'm told it's some side of \$200 billion or \$300 billion that the PC government has collected in royalties and interest off the heritage trust fund and spent it all.

Well, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood pointed out, Norway has been a great steward of its resource, saving over \$600 billion, investing outside of Norway so that they don't cause inflation. I greatly remember the government spending during the boom periods and the inflation that caused. I also remember reading a report about how if Alberta were to save some money properly, not from borrowing, that would stabilize our loonie from rising and making other parts of our economy noncompetitive.

The hon. Minister of Finance has mentioned how Albertans wanted to borrow to save for the heritage trust fund. Respectfully, I disagree.

5:40

Mr. Horner: That's not what I said, Drew.

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

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Well, respectfully, I disagree. Many, many people in Cypress-Medicine Hat have told me it makes absolutely no sense to borrow to save. Let's return to a surplus position first. We didn't get ourselves into this overspending and six deficits in a row easily, so that part of the hon. Member for Airdrie's plan makes huge sense. It'll cause less hardship. You know, there will be some changes in the economy.

The whole listening process. I mentioned briefly about how we're going to be spending the same as the government in approximately three years in capital even though we hear differently. I also want to mention the listening concept. I was at a Bill 2 hearing in Medicine Hat a short time ago, where the government people were going around again . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually never thought I would hear an opposition member speak so glowingly about Norway and its 70 per cent tax rate on resource revenues, nor would I get such a picturesque walk through Ontario and California and extolling the virtues of Ontario and California relative to Alberta. Quite amazing.

Budgeting, Mr. Speaker, based on a legislated population plus inflation growth factor or any other artificial formula, quite frankly, moves the budget process away from the careful weighting of competing priorities and consideration of the value of new initiatives towards a process defined by sterile limits that require the shrinking of government services in most years. That is a fact with respect to the experience that's been meted out in the world relative to the notion of inflation plus population spending limits.

Populations, Mr. Speaker, don't grow evenly. Segments of the population requiring the most government services such as senior citizens and children often expand more rapidly than the population as a whole. So while the entire population may grow at one rate, the population needing increased services often grows at an exponentially higher rate. Alberta's future only shows dependency ratios climbing in both the younger and the older generations.

Measures used also to determine inflation gauge the prices of individual consumer goods, Mr. Speaker, not government goods. That basket of goods is a basket of goods and services that normally aren't acquired by government. It is widely recognized that the cost of services and goods provided by government, mostly, I must say, services such as health and education, increase at a much higher rate than the cost of consumer goods.

This sort of legislation is indeed, Mr. Speaker, bad for business. In order to attract investment, the business climate needs to understand that they are welcome to come to a vibrant, business-activity type of province, where the province supports the business activity, where it helps to stimulate the creation of jobs and maintain the economic growth that we have had in our province for such a long time. We need solid infrastructure, a first-class education system, and we need quality health care.

Short-term deferrals can become long-term problems, Mr. Speaker. Any time that a government needs to cut spending, if it does it as a result of a legislated thing such as this, then it looks to cut items that will be deleted without a short-term impact on the provision of services. For example, government may defer routine maintenance items, capital improvement, staff training, or other investments in infrastructure or workforce. Such changes may help out in the short term; they have devastating effects in the long term. Such formulistic implications can sound reasonable but are actually a recipe for sharply reduced public services and, in fact, an impaired ability to respond effectively to public need, federal mandate, and changed circumstance.

I point at things, for example, like highway 63. Mr. Speaker, if this was enacted and you had a situation where the public desired to have 63 twinning brought to the fore faster than it had been planned, you would have had to sacrifice something else in the government in order to take care of that. Also, disaster relief comes to mind. Alberta is not a province where it's uncommon that we have disasters or we have bugs and things that cause problems in our forestry area. If we had these kinds of limits, we would have difficulty in that regard.

Tax and spending limits based on population changes and inflation, Mr. Speaker, will hinder significantly the ability of the government to cope with unanticipated changes, initiate policy changes, accommodate voter and court mandates, or even maintain current service levels. Jurisdictions which have adopted such legislation have either suspended or repealed it later, as I

mentioned, due to the unsustainability, low quality of life and business environment that it fosters.

I would like to spend a minute on the example of Colorado in this regard. Colorado's average teacher salary compared to average pay in other occupations declined from 30th in the nation in 1992 – and that's how long these kinds of ideas have floated around, Mr. Speaker; it's an old idea that nobody uses – to a low of 50th in 2001 and edging up only slightly to 49th in the United States as of 2007. How can you attract and keep good teachers when they're getting paid the lowest in the country and having to deal with the largest classroom sizes in the country?

Tuitions rose in Colorado as a result. In just three years system-wide resident tuition increased by anywhere between 21 and 39 per cent. How do you expect to create an educated workforce and attract world-class research with tuition rates so far above the national average? These are just some examples, Mr. Speaker, of things that were caused by bringing in legislation that didn't work and was repealed.

In Colorado they fell near to the bottom of national rankings in providing children with full, on-time vaccinations, in fact. The share of low-income children in the state who lacked health insurance doubled, making Colorado the worst in the nation by this measure. At one point, from April 2001 to October 2002, funding got so low that the state suspended its requirement that schoolchildren be fully vaccinated. Unlike any other state, the state of Colorado could not afford to buy the vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just spend a minute on what it takes in order to look after, I think, the area that the member opposite has been so patient in bringing forth to this Assembly and putting before his colleagues. The first thing is that the individuals that elect a government, a representative government as we have, a representative democracy as we indeed have – it's important that those folks elect good government. I'm proud to stand on this side of the House amongst individuals who are good government and will be for a long time.

Secondly, we need to have an effective budget analysis, Mr. Speaker. I'm worried about an effective budget analysis with what I heard last Wednesday in this Assembly, where member after member opposite stood up and said that they didn't understand the budget. I certainly hope that that's been remedied and that we can have an effective discussion regarding the budget.

Thirdly, we need to have a strong Public Accounts process. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to work with the Finance critic opposite, the good Member for Airdrie, in the Public Accounts area and do the work that we do together on that committee, that all-party committee, to ferret out the questions and things that need to be brought before the people. That is a part of holding the ministries accountable for the money that they spend on behalf of Albertans.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, it's good to have an independent, functional Auditor General, and we certainly have that. We have an independent individual who is working in our province to take a look at areas that he wants to have brought forward to the people of Alberta. This is much more effective than having some kind of a tight legislative rule of law that's there that will only inhibit our ability to be able to serve Albertans.

5:50

Fifth, we need to have openness and transparency, particularly with respect to annual returns and such. The annual returns that are produced by the ministry should be explanatory as to the dollars that are spent in our province on behalf of the people of

Alberta so that those individuals in Alberta will be able to see how the dollars are spent. This will help tremendously.

That, Mr. Speaker, is a summation of why I just don't think that particular part of this motion makes any sense at all, and I certainly won't be supporting it. I've supplied some of the things that we need to instead look at, which will help ensure that this province goes forward with another 42 years in the future, and I'm looking forward to assisting in that process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A point of clarification: how much time have I got, sir?

The Deputy Speaker: Approximately four minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Great. Thank you. I'll keep it quick.

It's been entertaining sitting here and watching the other side cackle and snicker and look at themselves as though they are the strong financial stewards of this province and pat themselves on the back. Here we have a so-called Conservative government that's run now six straight deficit budgets. You've taken what was once a \$17 billion savings account, that was started in 2003 – although your Premier seems to think that there wasn't a savings account started for the last 25 years. I think that's some pretty failed logic on basic math. You know, the idea that we can't legislate around spending more than population growth and inflation – I certainly respect the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's concerns and even Edmonton-Gold Bar's about what we would do in special circumstances. I can understand the logic behind that.

Contrary to that, I would also like members to consider that some of the only praise you have received for the budget that was delivered in this House was for some of the cuts that have been forced out of it. AHS, for example, is now streamlining some processes. They are becoming more efficient. I think that that's a natural progression of what happens when spending is restricted. That's exactly what you had given them the mandate to do, to restrict spending. Efficiencies happen, and I think that's a positive thing. Your whole process on results-based budgeting should be able to flesh some of those things out as well.

The idea of living within our means is something that you often hear in this House. The reality is that not many of you really fully understand what that means, clearly, because when you run \$17 billion in debt in the next three years, that's not really living within one's means. When we were on the campaign trail, myself specifically, this was one of the key platforms that people truly connected with. I think that you are going down a road at your own peril if you insist on thinking that Albertans are just going to accept this debt and that they're just going to take it. Good luck campaigning on that. Again, you can only say one thing and do something different so many times before people just finally go: "You know what? Enough is enough."

I think that Peter Lougheed had it right with the savings plan. Having some sort of sustainable revenue source outside of just resource revenue is absolutely visionary, and it's absolutely the direction that we need to go. We may disagree on exactly how to get there. Seeing some sort of savings plan is a positive step in Bill 12. When we get to that and debate that – it's interesting. It is a positive, but I don't think it goes quite far enough because, you know, just not taking a hundred per cent of the interest every year shouldn't really qualify as savings. That's just kind of intelligent.

The constant talk is about how our financial recovery plan is, you know, a faulty document. I mean, what we did is that we looked at the \$38 billion that you said you were going to spend and then we found: how can we make cuts off the top? The fact that it's not a bottom-up budget doesn't hold weight. We found areas where money could be saved, and I think that that speaks a lot to the passion here for . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I would invite the hon. Member for Airdrie to close debate on Motion 506.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for participating in this debate. Obviously, we don't have agreement here, but it's good to hash out these issues and debate them. I would like to correct a few things for the record because there's a lot of very shallow analysis that I've listened to.

The first was that this wasn't a credible idea. To be clear, one of the most credible organizations on economic issues in the world, the OECD, recently put out a report, in 2010, urging the Alberta government to legislate a spending cap just like this. Their conclusion was:

A legislated spending growth rule, rather than the current in-year spending rule, would help anchor fiscal policy and, if respected, would avoid another acceleration of spending when the budget is finally balanced [again].

This is the OECD, one of the most credible organizations on fiscal matters on the planet, specifically having a report out there for Alberta on this issue saying that we should do that.

Further, there were many other studies. I'll just cite one because it's a Canadian study, Tax and Expenditure Limitations: The Next Step in Fiscal Discipline, by Jason Clemens, Todd Fox, and Amela Karabegović. I'm not going to pretend to pronounce that name properly. In any event, they studied all of these different laws in North America, actually, Canada and the United States, and their conclusion was:

Laws enforcing tax and expenditure limitations have generally proven effective in the United States, at both the state and local level, in constraining the growth of government spending and taxation . . . [and any] variance in performance among states with [these laws] can be explained by the design of the [laws] themselves.

So there were some that had better luck than others. If there were problems, it was mostly because of a flaw in design. I would ask that if we ever did this in the future, we talk through it well and make sure that we design the best possible spending restraint rule, and we would.

With regard to being competitive for salaries one of the things that they pointed out earlier was the Colorado example. You can design the law – and I did this, actually, in my private member's bill that I brought in 2011 on this exact spending restraint rule – so that when expenses get to the average of the other Canadian provinces or 5 per cent above the average of the rest of the Canadian provinces, then it can go up with that average instead of just limiting it to inflation plus population growth. The inflation plus population growth gets you down to where you need to be over time, and then from there it can kind of go back up with the Canadian average but not where we are now, which is far, far, far above the Canadian average, and it's really, really hurting us. So there are ways to design the law competently.

The Minister of Finance this year holds the line on expenses. That's good. It's good to hold the line on expenses. But he should know and I think we all know in this House, any of us who have

tried to lose weight in the past, that if you need to lose 40 pounds, Mr. Speaker, losing zero is just not enough. You really do have to cut more than zero if you want to lose a few pounds. We have a fat, bloated government, and we do need to thin out especially the bureaucracy. There's no doubt about it.

Then flexibility. Politicians never want to have their hands tied. Let's face it. They never want their hands tied. But the fact is that spending has gone up over the last 10 years 100 per cent, double the rate of inflation plus population growth. That's what happens when politicians don't have their hands tied. They cannot control themselves. They just can't. Debt and spending is like a heroin addiction for a junky when you're talking about governments. They can't stop themselves unless they have some restraint in good years. Otherwise, in good years they just run it right up. So we do need that kind of restraint.

Also, this idea of borrowing to save: it really doesn't make a lot of sense. People don't understand why we'd want to, say, borrow \$13 billion over the next three years to save a few hundred million. It really is baffling to people. It shouldn't be done.

I would also say that with regard to kids needing schools – I've got four boys. Obviously, I care a great deal about schools, as I'm sure everyone in this room does, but let's make sure we understand what we're getting ourselves into. That same argument can be used for the next hundred years. That is what's been used in Ontario, Quebec, Greece, England, France, Spain, Italy. Every single country that is now facing a debt crisis uses that exact same left-wing tripe to justify their actions. That's the problem. It will never be enough. It'll never be enough, Minister. At some point . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Donovan	Rowe
Anglin	Forsyth	Saskiw
Barnes	Hale	Strankman
Bikman	Pedersen	Wilson

Against the motion:

Allen	Horner	Pastoor
Bhardwaj	Jeneroux	Quest
Brown	Johnson, L.	Sandhu
Casey	Khan	Sarich
DeLong	Klimchuk	Scott
Denis	Kubinec	Starke
Dorward	Lemke	Swann
Drysdale	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Lukaszuk	Weadick
Fenske	Mason	Webber
Fraser	McDonald	Woo-Paw
Goudreau	Oberle	Xiao
Hancock	Olson	

Totals: For – 12 Against – 38

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:12 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	1611
Introduction of Visitors	1611
Introduction of Guests	1611
Members' Statements	
High School Flexibility Program in Slave Lake	1612
Wildrose Caucus Charitable Foundation	1613
Phil Meagher	1621
Earth Hour 2013	1622
Prostate Cancer Awareness and Screening Initiative	1622
Support for Education	1622
Oral Question Period	
MLA Remuneration	1613
Provincial Fiscal Deficit	1613
Provincial Budget	1614
Health Services Performance Measures	1615
Bitumen Upgrading	1615
Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Program	1616
Labour Negotiations with Teachers	1616
Physician Recruitment	1617
Market Access for Oil	1617
Physician Services Agreement	1618
Postsecondary Education Funding	1618
Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors	1619
Education Concerns in Calgary-Glenmore	1619
Farm Fuel Distribution Allowance	1620
Support for Child Care	1620
Sale of Public Land for Commercial Use	1620
Traffic Court	1621
Tabling Returns and Reports	1623
Tablings to the Clerk	1623
Orders of the Day	1626
Written Questions	
Provision of Continuing Care Beds	1626
Community Treatment Orders	1627
New Special-needs Child Care Spaces	1628
Student Loan Amounts for Medical School Graduates	1629
Workers' Compensation Board Complaints	1630
Inmate Population at Correction Institutions	1631
Staffing Details for CFSAs	1632
Reported Abuse of Children in Provincial Care	1633
Cost for Residents in Continuing Care Facilities	1634
Hospital Occupancy Rates	1635
Motions for Returns	
Nuclear Power	1636
Public-private Partnership School Designs	1636
Government Aircraft Records	1636
Swan Hills In Situ Coal Gasification Project	1638
School Fees Details	1639
Public Funding for Private Schools	1640
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Fiscal Policy Legislation	1640
Division	1647

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