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The 28th Legislature
First Session

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Tuesday, April 16, 2013

Issue 46

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 16, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and guests, let us pray. May we know what is true and pure, may our hearts be filled with joy and kindness, and may our minds guide our actions in favour of those whom we humbly serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly nine individuals who are the 2013 nominees for the Ernest C. Manning innovation awards, Canada's most prestigious innovation awards. The Ernest C. Manning innovation awards recognize Canadians of all ages with the imagination to innovate and the stamina to succeed. Albertans are well represented as recipients of Manning awards since they were established some years ago as a national award program named after Alberta Premier Ernest C. Manning.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in your gallery, and they are: Carl Denis, innovator of the Freedom patient immobilization system medical device; Kevin Grumetza, innovator of the Easy Sheet curling rink liner; Camiel Huisma, innovator of GrowSafe technology, a data system for the agricultural industry; Gregory Hunt, innovator of PackJack, a lightweight, easy-to-use motorcycle jack; Dr. Deepak Kaura and Rohit Joshi, innovators of the Brightsquid dental link; J. Scott Moore of UTFx Precise Transcript Management; John Putters, innovator of WANDA, washroom management software; and Randy Schmitz, innovator of Schmitz Mittz, an indestructible safety glove. Another Alberta innovator, Dr. Naser El-Sheimy, who developed Trusted Positioning platforms, is out of the country speaking about his innovation at this time and could not join us. I'd ask the nominees to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour and privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 53 of the best and brightest students from l'école Greenview elementary school who are joined by their teachers, Cheri Krywko and Angela Sharun, and also parent helpers Carolyn, Terri, Stéphanie, and Chris. They are here today to observe some of our proceedings, and I would request that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this House a group of fantastic grade 6 students visiting from my constituency. The 31 students from Bowden Grandview school, who are all clearly

taller than I am, are sitting in the gallery along with their teachers, Tracy Dreher and Brenda Sherwood, and dedicated parent helpers. I hope they enjoy their time at the Legislature. I'll ask them to please stand as my hon. colleagues provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 41 grade 6 students from the Elk Point elementary school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Hlushak, Mrs. Youngmans, and Mrs. Pindroch, as well as parent volunteers. I would ask that all of these guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five special guests who I will ask to rise as I mention their names. The first is Lowell Thronson and his wife, Laurel, who have been residents of St. Albert for over 30 years. Lowell was an educator in the province for 40 years, serving as the principal of several St. Albert elementary schools, the deputy superintendent of St. Albert public school division, and he later served with distinction as superintendent of the Black Gold school division. But Mr. Thronson will be always remembered by me very fondly as my first principal in elementary school at Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Also attending is their son Dale Thronson, his wife, Lynn, and Lynn's mother, Gladys Toth.

This group also has another interest in attending question period, and that's to see their son and grandson Ben Thronson serve as our hard-working page. Thank you again, Ben. Ben is the student council president at Sainte Marguerite d'Youville in St. Albert. Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, this past November, for November, Ben grew a better moustache than a number of our colleagues in the House. Would you please stand to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an outstanding Albertan, a mentor, a friend, and an Alberta sports icon. Larry Mather is one of the reasons Olympic weightlifting exists in the province of Alberta. Larry began coaching Olympic weightlifting in the fall of 1965 in a club in Red Deer, and by 1973 he had opened Alberta's first stand-alone weightlifting club in Alberta, the Grierson weightlifting club. Grierson would go on to serve as a national team training camp in 1977 and played an important role in the success of the Canadian weightlifting team at the 1978 Commonwealth Games in the province.

Larry honed his skills and ultimately became one of the most highly regarded coaches in the country, serving from 1973 to 1983 as one of the Canadian national team coaches. Athletes from a number of different sports have taken advantage of Larry's skills. For nearly 50 years Larry has been a major presence in the Alberta sport. He's joined here today by his lovely wife, Clarece, and his

son Steven. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, your second introduction.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, it is an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you Mr. Russ Pickford, Charles Klaver, and our very own powerhouse, Ms Wendy Rodgers. All three are outstanding public servants and are veterans of the Grierson weightlifting club. Grierson will be celebrating their 40th anniversary this Saturday. It played a very, very significant role in Wendy's weightlifting career, along with Larry, for 15 years. She competed locally, nationally, internationally, and at masters weightlifting competitions, including pan-American competitions. I'd ask all of my guests at this time to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. I would respectfully request your guidance as to the timing of this point of order, which deals with the handling of estimates by the government in the various committees of the House. I would be pleased to raise it at the time that you recommend.

The Speaker: At the appropriate time. Let us move on at this time with Members' Statements. We've already recognized this, and I'll come back to your point in a moment.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

1:40 Upgrades for Seniors' Accommodations

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to recognize the announcement made by my colleague the Hon. Doug Griffiths, Minister of Municipal Affairs. As a passionate advocate for seniors' issues for many years, this is good news. Albertans living in seniors' lodges can expect modernization and greater comfort through a nearly \$31 million investment in the seniors' lodge renewal grants. There are more than 10,000 lodges, cottages, and unique home units in Alberta. The housing management body for these units will be allocated \$3,000 in funding for every unit it owns or manages.

Mr. Speaker, the Green Acres Foundation, which manages lodges in my constituency of Lethbridge-East among others in our area and our city, will be receiving nearly \$2.3 million. It will be most welcome as some of these units are almost as old as their residents. Other southern Alberta communities, Blairmore and Taber, will be receiving \$174,000 and \$231,000 respectively for their lodge upgrades. This money will be provided for building repairs, mechanical and plumbing upgrades, fire and safety upgrades, and dining room and resident expansion.

This government is committed to ensuring that residents in seniors' lodges have a safe, comfortable, and affordable place to live with the very important aspect of daily socialization. Looking forward, this government will continue to develop a proactive long-term capital plan for seniors' lodges. I wish to again commend my colleague and his ministry for their commitment to

seniors' housing in this province that helps meet their current and future needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Government Health Policies

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One has to wonder about the state of our health care system. For months doctors have been asking for the minister to call and engage with them on their contract. After a long-drawn-out, painful process the minister finally picked up the phone and – surprise, surprise – results. What an ordeal to get here. The Health minister brought the system to the brink before doing his job and recognizing that doctors play an important role in the health care system. Unfortunately, pharmacists are still out in the cold.

This arrogant I-know-best attitude permeates the health care system. Without consultation long-term care beds in Carmangay and Strathmore were closed, kicking out vulnerable seniors to facilities that provide lower levels of care. Vulnerable residents of Michener Centre, the same fate: no consultation with family, caregivers, or staff. Michener families are told that 50 seniors won't be forced to leave – I think we heard that in Carmangay – and that they'll be placed into continuing care facilities. Where? There are 486 long-term care clients in acute-care beds awaiting placement, and continuing care lists are as long as your arm. Will these seniors jump the queue, or is this minister confused on Alberta Health Services' placement policy?

Let's get to those infamous targets that the government insists will improve health care. Hip replacement surgery: target is 22 weeks. Get on the list today, and you'll wait 37. Knee replacement: target is 28 weeks. We wait almost three months longer, 39 weeks. Scheduled bypass surgery: target is 6 weeks. We wait 25 weeks. Yet health executives received their bonuses last year, the year before, and the year before that.

Then we get to those pesky, darned old expense accounts. The minister would like everyone to forgive and forget those, expense accounts that led to luxury cars, fancy parties, lavish dinners, and even specialized visits to the Mayo Clinic in the U.S. The minister says that he's disappointed and disgusted and that the past is the past. I guess it just doesn't matter if they make the wrong decisions today because it will all be in the past tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the leader of the New Democratic opposition rose on a point of order, which we will entertain at the regular time, at the end of question period, toward the end of the Routine.

In the meantime let's carry on with Members' Statements and hear from Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Lakeland Centre for FASD

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Lakeland FASD Society operates the Lakeland Centre for FASD in Cold Lake and is an excellent example of community collaboration to develop needed FASD prevention, education, and services. The Lakeland area has been working since 1994 on better understanding the disability of FASD and women who drink during pregnancy.

This working committee has evolved into a society and leading agency in developing rural-based approaches to addressing

diagnosis/assessment, intense prevention programs for women, and supports to those who are affected.

Since opening in July 2012, the program has accepted women into the program with amazing results. Ninety per cent of the women have been pregnant. The youngest patient has been 15 years of age. Ninety-five per cent of the women themselves have had a diagnosis of FASD or suspected. The average number of children they've had prior to coming to treatment is three. A hundred per cent of the women who've completed the program have maintained sobriety for at least three months following this program. Seventy-five per cent of the women came into this program homeless, and 97 per cent of them have left with a stable housing plan on discharge along with relevant services. Many of the women have had their children returned to them after completion of this program. One woman had a child protection alert removed from her file at the birth of her child, thus allowing her to finally take her baby home.

The program also shows a strong social return on investment in the early days. The 2nd Floor Women's Recovery centre program shows that for every dollar the government spends on this program, two dollars are saved.

The 2nd Floor Women's Recovery Centre program is available to eligible women across the province and fills a desperate need to provide services to this very challenging-to-serve group of women. The belief of this program is that if they can support the women and connect them with meaningful services on baby number one or two, we can prevent many children from being born alcohol or drug exposed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Could I just remind particularly members on the government side to please keep your conversations down to a minimum volume level? It's sometimes difficult to hear when people are speaking their members' statements.

Thank you very much.

Let's move on to Edmonton-McClung.

Edmonton Callingwood Farmers' Market

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spring is always an exciting time for me not only because I know that summer is on its way but because a very special annual event begins, one that combines community spirit with entrepreneurial flair. The Edmonton Callingwood Farmers' Market in my constituency, Edmonton's original and only Sunday market, starts its new season on Sunday, May 5, 2013. It also opens on Wednesdays.

Mr. Speaker, as you enjoy the scents of the many beautiful flowers, you will be serenaded by the lovely sounds of musicians while you browse and make your purchases. You can find almost anything and everything, including organic vegetables, sumptuous wild mushrooms, artisanal handicrafts, homemade foods such as pies, fresh pastas, game meats, and organic honey to name a few. Last year I had the opportunity to purchase a bottle of very delicious honey wine and an amazing home-baked strawberry-rhubarb pie. I can't wait to get my hands on more homemade goods this summer.

In fact, 80 per cent of the vendors at the Callingwood market sell products that have been locally produced, baked, or grown by the vendors, and purchasing these products means helping to build and support our farmers and our economy.

From time to time, Mr. Speaker, I set up a booth at the market so I can have meaningful one-on-one conversations with my

constituents on the issues that concern them the most. This allows me to better listen to their concerns and bring them forward to the government table and eventually to this House.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite you and everyone in this House and all Albertans to Callingwood Farmers' Market to taste some of the best kettle corn you might ever have.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for her first set of main questions.

Carbon Tax

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, before we get to the troubling issue surrounding the latest health care scandal, let me begin with a simple question. Now that the Premier is back from Washington, trying to clear up some confusion, will her government be raising the current carbon tax from \$15 per tonne to \$40 per tonne, and will they be raising the emission reduction target from its current level of 12 per cent to 40 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I clearly answered this question last week, but I'm very happy to provide the hon. member with information again. We are in the process with the federal government of a review of each sector with regard to GHG emissions reduction. We have completed the coal sector. We've completed the transportation sector. We are now in the oil and gas sector. It is too early in the process, because we're just beginning it, to comment on any of the options that are before our partners.

1:50

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said this during an interview in *Maclean's* magazine: "So 40/40 isn't a number that we've in any way landed on or proposed." Yet the 40/40 scenario appears as a proposal in the Environment minister's presentation to industry. It's reported by various industry sources as a proposed target. Let's see if we can get some clarity. Is the Premier denying that the 40/40 plan has been part of the government's discussions with industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said and as the Premier has said, we are working with industry, we are working with our stakeholders, and we're working with the federal government on a sector-by-sector approach. We're on the oil and gas sector right now. We are looking at many different scenarios so that federally they can meet their emission reduction targets and we can as well. It is way too early in the process, but once we're at that point, we'll be happy to share with the hon. member and all Albertans and Canadians.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, since we've seen with this Premier and this government that a promise isn't a promise and a tax isn't a tax and a raise isn't a raise and a decision isn't a decision, I guess we can certainly understand why a proposal isn't really a proposal. But since the government claims that all of this is designed to make us look greener and to convince our critics that Alberta has a good record on emissions, will the government reject this punitive approach and propose something that will actually work to reduce emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2008 this government has had the first plan in North America that is reducing emissions. We have a technology fund as well. Our plan is to make sure that we can access important markets for Canadians and for Albertans. That is our plan, and while doing that, we do a sector-by-sector approach. We've committed and the federal government has committed to meeting our 2050 targets, and that's what we're working to do.

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

Ms Smith: We'll try again another day, Mr. Speaker.

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: There are more revelations today on the issue we raised yesterday about a former Capital health executive who expensed a \$7,000 visit to the Mayo Clinic. That executive has since explained that she was treated for a form of cancer here in Alberta and was told that she was cured. Then her boss, former CEO Sheila Weatherill, told her to go get checked out at the Mayo Clinic just to be sure. This raises so many questions, Mr. Speaker, starting with: just how widespread is this practice of having Alberta diagnoses confirmed by the Mayo Clinic?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the allegation that was made yesterday, as the hon. member says, was confirmed today by the individual involved. This is with respect to a situation in 2007. There's no other reaction to this than to describe it for what it is, which is wrong. It is offensive. It is offensive to Albertans. It is a situation that occurred six years ago that should never have occurred.

What is important, of course, is that today we have a single health authority with a single set of rules in place that would never allow this situation to occur again.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister is right. It is offensive.

Many Albertans have received the bad news of a cancer diagnosis, and because of the outstanding work of the dedicated health professionals at the Cross cancer clinic and the Tom Baker cancer centre, they've received clean bills of health. Can the Minister of Health tell us how many of those people who are not current or former health executives get a confirmation examination at the Mayo Clinic that's paid for by taxpayers?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to focus on situations that occurred in 2007 or 2005 or 2003, she's very welcome to do that. It certainly does not take away from the fact that this situation is wrong and should never have happened.

I'm sure that the hon. member would agree with me that we have among the finest cancer care in North America right here in Alberta. We have a single health authority with a single set of rules, open and transparent rules that allow Albertans to verify that this situation could not happen and is not happening in Alberta today.

Ms Smith: The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of those folks were around in 2007, so it is still relevant today.

We asked about this yesterday, wondering if this was just another example of a sloppy expense policy, or perhaps it was a workaround to avoid lengthy wait times here at home. Now it's revealed that it's a special perk available to high-ranking health

executives. This happened in 2007. Was the minister aware of this practice, and did he do anything specific to end it?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the hon. member was doing in 2007. I can tell you that I was not the Minister of Health in 2007. While the single incident is indeed offensive to all Albertans, to suggest that this practice is continuing today is to simply ignore the fact . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Leader of the Liberal opposition, leader of the Wildrose, you're welcome to converse outside if you wish but not in here during someone else's time.

Hon. minister, please conclude your comments.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To finish, of course, as the hon. member well knows, we have one set of rules today. We have one health region to deliver health care services in the province. We have the single most stringent and transparent set of rules around executive compensation and expenses that we will find anywhere in this country, and that's what Albertans can rely on.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: I apologize, Mr. Speaker, but I think that the hon. member was actually working for the then Health minister at the time, in 2007, so he was very much involved.

We don't want to dig into the personal details of someone's medical history, but the individual who was at the centre of the Mayo Clinic issue has confirmed the details about her case, her diagnosis, and the trip. This is an issue of confidence in the system. Now, the minister likes to say that we undermine the system with our questions, but I ask him: what could be more undermining than when executives who run the health system don't trust what our doctors have to say and spend our precious health care dollars to hire Americans to check on their work?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, from what I'm told from yesterday, the hon. member had no compunction whatsoever insofar as talking about individual details with respect to health care received here or elsewhere, so let's put an end to that fallacy.

Secondly, the opposition does routinely, Mr. Speaker, attempt to undermine the confidence of Albertans in 2013, not in 2007, in the very fine health care system that we offer Albertans today, and she continues to ignore, despite having made requests repeatedly over her time in this House, the fact that we have the most stringent rules around expenses and disclosure that will be found anywhere in this country.

Ms Smith: The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that yesterday the Deputy Premier didn't have a clue about what was going on. The Premier said: oh, it was all in the past. You'll forgive me for not believing this.

Will the minister provide concrete assurances that this practice has been stopped and that he will make every effort to ensure that this money is paid back and returned to Alberta taxpayers?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has no basis whatsoever to claim that this is a common practice in Alberta today.

On the question of recovering the expenses, I can tell you that yesterday, when the allegation was made, the opposition offered no proof. Today, when the individual involved confirmed the information, I immediately consulted with our legal counsel. This

is an important principle. Unfortunately, there is not a legal way, I'm advised, to recover the funds. As offensive as it is, what Albertans again can take comfort in is that this Premier and this government have taken steps to make sure that this situation cannot occur today.

Ms Smith: It's the same government, Mr. Speaker.

The minister often speaks about how great Alberta's health care system is, and on that point he is right. We have great doctors, nurses, facilities, and support systems. But the administration is abysmal. The cavalier attitude toward expenses displayed by current and former Health executives is shocking, and that's why we continue to ask this question. Will the minister release all of the expenses of all of the executives of all of the health regions going back to 2005? Let's get to the bottom of this.

2:00

Mr. Horne: Apparently, Mr. Speaker, the era in question now goes back to 2005. These hon. members and other hon. members on all sides of the House have made very good use of the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to access information that they wish to bring to light. Albertans who are concerned about these issues have made use of the same process.

It is not for elected people, for political people to decide what information should and should not be made available under that act. That is an independent process. People under that process have legal rights, and I would challenge the hon. Leader of the Opposition to suggest that we should otherwise interfere.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, followed by the New Democrat opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most members of this House are aware that I was once in government. Now, one thing I can tell you is that government sees every single FOIP before it gets out, so it's very difficult to believe that nobody in government knew that the issue of the Mayo Clinic invoice, which was expensed by the former executive vice-president and COO of Capital health and approved by the CEO, was a clear case of queue-jumping. To the Deputy Premier: were you just very poorly briefed, or did you mislead the House yesterday?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. Yesterday I did not have available to me the evidence that is available to us today, so I was making statements based on the fact that it is inappropriate to make slanderous remarks about any Albertan unless you have solid evidence to support it. Today, now that the additional evidence has become available to me, I have to tell you that in view of this new evidence my comments yesterday were wrong. I fully support the minister in his comments, and I know that he has put a system in place to make sure that events like these don't occur into the future.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Deputy Premier saying that he was poorly briefed or clueless.

To the Premier, the Health minister, or whomever is properly briefed today: what is the government going to do about the fact that the individual who signed off on this queue-jumping expense claim and who was on the board of AHS until very recently, the former Capital health CEO, did not see fit to mention this while testifying under oath before the queue-jumping inquiry, which is very conveniently no longer hearing testimony? Is this why you wanted to end the inquiry so quickly, Minister? Is this why you wanted to end that inquiry?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, let me take the opportunity to correct the hon. member on a couple of counts. First of all, the government does not review all the FOIP requests that are made in this province. That is legislation that governs an independent process, and that process is available to all members of this House and to all Albertans. To suggest otherwise is wrong.

Secondly, on the question of the review and approval of the expense in question six years ago I cannot answer why the decision was made or whether it was in accordance with rules that were in place at the time. What I can answer for is the rules that are in place today, rules that would not permit a situation like this to ever occur again.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's amazing how this minister slips and slides and how this government jumps when there's a FOIP and some light shines in dark places. Suddenly the government gets religion and orders that unsavoury practices be discontinued.

Premier, since you only root out corruption and waste when we point it out, could you please expedite the process and tell us what we should FOIP next? Better yet, will you finally do the right thing and authorize the forensic audit of the Capital health region, which Dr. Chris Eagle, the current CEO of AHS, called for, which you blocked?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, that is entirely inaccurate. The hon. member knows that the Alberta Health Services Board of its own volition asked the Auditor General to audit the expenses of senior executives at AHS, including those individuals who are serving in executive positions now that also served in executive positions in the previous health regions. That report has been made public. There were no concerns expressed with the expenses.

This hon. member needs to make a decision as to whether or not he is going to stand up for the health system that we have in 2013 or whether he wants to stand up or not for a health system in 2007 or earlier.

Speaker's Ruling FOIP Requests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to review *Hansard* a little bit later, but there was some comment which I think the Alberta Liberal leader made with respect to FOIP. The Information and Privacy Commissioner will be very interested, I'm sure, to read those comments because to my knowledge freedom of information requests are not routinely shared with the government. We'll have a look at that and get a comment and clear that point up, so let's not get into any points of order today on that. We'll sort this out and report back to you. Thank you.

Let us move on. The leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Recovery of Health Executive Expenses

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today the former VP of Capital health released a statement confirming that Capital health did indeed pay more than \$7,000 so she could get a second opinion after being declared cancer free by Alberta doctors. This was never considered by the medical committee that approves out-of-province treatment. The former CEO of Capital health, who approved this, received a \$5.7 million severance when Alberta Health Services was created. What will this government do to get the \$7,000 back from the former CEO?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is obviously as outraged as I am and I believe the rest of the members are with respect to this situation that occurred in 2007. I am not familiar

with the terms of the severance for that employee, so I can't speak to the accuracy of his comments in that regard. What I can tell you is that as soon as I learned today, when the new information came to light today, that the individual in question had admitted that the expense was claimed and approved, I asked our legal counsel if there was an opportunity for us to try to recover that money on behalf of Albertans. Unfortunately, there is not that opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm going to ask the Health minister to go back to his legal counsel because the use of public funds by the former CEO of Capital health to send the former vice-president of Capital health to the Mayo Clinic was a violation not only of Alberta Health policy but a violation of section 12(1)(a) of the Canada Health Act. It may also contravene section 122 of the Criminal Code of Canada. What is the minister going to do about it?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to rely on the advice of legal counsel with respect to this matter. If the hon. member wants to stand in front of the House and interpret the law for us, I guess that's entirely up to him. What I can tell you is that I immediately sought the opinion this morning of our legal counsel after the individual in question confirmed that the expense was claimed and reimbursed. It doesn't change the fact that it is wrong. It doesn't change the fact that Albertans are outraged. But it does unfortunately present us with a situation where legally we are not able to pursue recovery of those funds.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, when you talk to your lawyer, Mr. Minister, you've got to ask the right questions.

This government attempts to brush aside evidence of serious violations of the law, breaches of ethics, and misuse of public funds. It refused to extend the Vertes inquiry when Justice Vertes requested more time to uncover evidence. He called the government's refusal interference with the inquiry. To the Health minister: why is your government covering up wrongdoing by the Capital health authority?

Mr. Horne: With respect to the independent inquiry that is under way into improper preferential access – and it is an independent inquiry, I'd remind the hon. member – those decisions as to what evidence should be considered belong with the commissioner for the inquiry, Justice Vertes. The justice did request an extension, and he was granted an extension to complete the report. That report is due on August 31, 2013, Mr. Speaker, and it will be delivered to you, as you know, for distribution to all members.

Out-of-country Health Services

Mrs. Towle: The past is the past. That's what we hear every time we raise the issue of abuse of taxpayer dollars by health care executives. Yet for Fort McMurray's Shane Wambolt the past is not over. Shane had a brain tumour the size of a golf ball that was causing him to go blind. If he had waited another three months to have it removed, he would have been, and I quote, deemed a vegetable. The out-of-province committee refused to pay for this surgery because they said that it was elective. To the Health minister: what possible explanation is there for covering private treatments at the Mayo Clinic for health executives while people

like Shane Wambolt are desperately in need of similar-type care and similar-type coverage?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I think we've all pointed out, there is absolutely no excuse for the situation that was reported on that occurred in 2007, and no one is attempting to suggest anything otherwise. To compare that situation to the individual – and as we know, we must be cautious in the House to observe the provisions of the Health Information Act when talking about individuals' medical care or treatment or personal medical information. There is an appropriate process for seeking approval for out-of-country medical services. This particular constituent is well represented by his MLA, who is a member of the government caucus. We're familiar with the situation.

2:10

Mrs. Towle: Well, that's great. I'll send his MLA this file, and perhaps he can advocate on his behalf.

Given that Shane has been denied six times on technicalities and is now refiled for the seventh time and given that this two-tier health care system allows for Alberta Health Services executives to receive immediate access to private health care while everyday Albertans wait, will this minister sincerely take on Shane's case no matter who's advocating for him and pay for his procedure and afford him the same special treatment that you afforded to Michele Lahey?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, with respect to this individual – and, again, I would remind everyone of the provisions of the Health Information Act – I have met the individual in question. I have talked with the individual. I have taken steps within my ministry to ensure that he's been provided with all of the information with respect to the process for seeking the reimbursement that is being sought. We have taken every possible step to ensure that the fair and transparent process that overrides the Out-of-country Health Services Committee and its appeal panel is being observed in this case.

Mrs. Towle: Sadly, that's not the case because clearly this AHS executive didn't have to go through the same committee.

Given that on November 28, 2011, the Premier agreed to look into Shane's case and given that his family has now recently filed for bankruptcy – they've been forced to sell their home because of the out-of-pocket expenses for this operation – and given that Alberta Health executives can simply expense what others are literally dying for, will this hon. Premier keep her promise and do the right thing by ensuring that this family has the same standards that clearly are afforded to Alberta health care executives?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, had I thought that the House would have the patience, I would have raised a point of order based on the hon. member's last statement. There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the situation that occurred in 2007 can occur today. In fact, the evidence is just the opposite. The hon. members love to make loose connections between a past offence, the present, and the future. The fact of the matter is that the rules are in place. The expenses are approved in accordance with those rules. They are transparent. The receipts are there for all to see. This is a system that stands up for those sorts of issues.

Memorandum of Understanding with Physicians

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Alberta government and the Alberta Medical Association signed an MOU that provides long-term stability for the health system. My questions are to the

Minister of Health. After years of negotiations and two previous attempts that did not result in a final agreement, can the minister explain to the House what the difference is with this agreement and why Albertans should be confident that the issue is resolved once and for all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed very pleased to have been able to reach a memorandum of understanding with the Alberta Medical Association. There's no question that this has been a long negotiation. It spans multiple ministers over a two-and-a-half-year period. This is a seven-year deal. In addition to providing some support for reducing costs in our health system over time, the agreement provides a series of pay increases for doctors, it provides stability over a seven-year period, and most importantly it recognizes the Alberta Medical Association as the representative body for physicians in our province.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, there is some skepticism that this deal is as good as it looks. I'll quote a doctor in my constituency who said to me last night: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Is this pudding still going to taste good after April 22?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the president of the Alberta Medical Association has made it clear in his statements to the media that he is indeed very excited about this deal and what it can mean for Alberta's doctors. He has indicated, obviously, his recommendation for it. He has signed the deal. He has talked, I think very eloquently, about the opportunities for partnership between government, the Alberta Medical Association, and Alberta Health Services to do what we all want to do, and that's to make the health care system works better for patients.

Ms Jansen: My final question, Mr. Speaker. Is there anything in this agreement that assures Albertans that the government and the doctors are on the same page when it comes to primary care?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the memorandum of understanding does speak extensively to primary care. It talks about a partnership between government and the AMA to further develop primary care across the province. That work had been ongoing but had yet to be recognized in a formal agreement. I'm very pleased to see it there. All Albertans want to have the opportunity for access to a family doctor and to other professionals that work with doctors to provide everyone with a home in our health care system.

Compensation for Pharmacy Services

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, yesterday this Health minister announced that he had given up on his failed strategy of fighting with our hard-working docs and picked up the phone, called the head of AMA, and he struck a deal. Now, I could congratulate the Health minister if this was the only part of his portfolio that he was messing up. My question is to the minister. Now that he has seen that taking an arrogant I-know-better-than-anyone-else attitude doesn't work, will he pick up the phone and call the head of the Pharmacists Association and fix his ill-conceived plan for generic drugs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is hard to know how to reply sometimes to questions as they're put in this

House. What I can say is that the credit for the hard-won memorandum of understanding that was announced yesterday belongs to the government, it belongs to the Alberta Medical Association, and, most importantly, it belongs to doctors and patients across the province who worked hard to help us find a way to make this deal possible. This is arguably one of the most important agreements with a medical association in the country in recent years. It provides the need for no further negotiation on issues such as the relationship between government and the AMA. It is what we have sought to provide.

Mrs. Forsyth: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The credit goes to the hard-working doctors in this province.

Given that this Health minister says that he wants to lower generic drug prices and given that not just one but two major generic drug companies have now raised their prices on dozens of medications, will he admit that his plan is failing and it is leading to higher, not lower, drug prices for Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a choice that the hon. member needs to make, and I guess the choice is: does she want to be on the side of large drug manufacturers who sell to 60 to 70 countries around the world, or does she want to be on the side of taxpayers and patients and pharmacists in this province who not only want lower drug prices but want their pharmacists to be recognized as full professionals and as partners in the health care team? The policy that we have outlined with respect to reducing generic drug prices delivers on the value side. It also delivers for pharmacists and patients in terms of better health care.

Mrs. Forsyth: Let's be clear, Minister. We're on the side of patients, and your ill-conceived plan is going to screw them.

Given that these two major drug companies, Teva and Apotex, have generally refused to meet the government's across-the-board 18 per cent price and given that Alberta Health has had to relist unavailable drugs like penicillin at a higher price, will the minister admit that his Fred-icare plan is a failure and scrap it?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would benefit from some better research. In fact, on April 1 in response to a pan-Canadian decision by all provinces to set the price for our six top-volume generic drugs at 18 per cent, I'm pleased to report to this House that the manufacturers have met the 18 per cent price quotation on those six drugs. With the top 20 generic drugs in this province available in New Zealand and Australia at \$30 million to \$40 million less than the 18 per cent that we're prepared to pay, I have to wonder whose side this hon. member is really on.

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

2:20

Recycling of Small Appliances

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta was the first jurisdiction in North America to institute a recycling program for electronic items. However, there is still a considerable list of items that are not yet recyclable such as small appliances like toasters. In fact, approximately 13 tonnes a day of ineligible electronic items end up in garbage trucks bound for landfills. My question is to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Given that certain appliances are recyclable under the existing electronics recycling program, why do we not expand that program to encompass a broader range of electronic items?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta we're pretty excited and proud of the work that's happened to date on recycling, and we're proud of the work that the Alberta Recycling Management Authority has done. Quite frankly, Albertans and municipalities are asking us exactly what this hon. member is asking, a very good question. When are we going to add more items with regard to recycling? Albertans want to do the right thing. We've asked ARMA, the Alberta Recycling Management Authority, to go back and consult with Albertans so that we can do what they would like us to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when can my constituents and all Albertans expect an answer from ARMA on this important initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important for Albertans to have the opportunity to give us input through ARMA about the kind of additional items they would like us to include. We've had some input with regard to things like toasters, irons, and other household items. We've asked them to go out and ask Albertans what they want to do – that's their job as an arm's-length agency – and to come back to us sometime within this year, when they've done that work, so that we can then review what Albertans have told us and make sure that not only do we have an outstanding program now and lead across the nation but that we continue to do that as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: do you have any idea what the costs might be for this expanded program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the recycling programs only cover the costs that are needed. Quite frankly, ARMA has done a very good job over the years of actually reducing costs. Those costs are kept to a minimum because what we want to do is incent Albertans to recycle and to reuse. So the costs are only to cover operations.

The Speaker: Any further questions about costs can be addressed in estimates today because I think that department is up later.

Let us move on to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

PDD Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities still doesn't get it. A budget-imposed revolution in PDD programming is being imposed without adequate time and without respecting the people most affected. This government refuses to listen to those living the experience, relying on his staff to make arbitrary and potentially harmful decisions. Shockingly, this minister gives them three months to adjust to dramatic changes in their care and quality of life. When will this minister work with the volunteer sector and develop a plan and a budget process that respects and harnesses the expertise of those receiving the services and doing the work?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the changes that we're planning to make this year have been talked about for years. They were made in consultation with stakeholders, user groups out there, and my staff. I hope the hon. member would support that. We believe that the time is right. We believe that we're implementing best practices. We're going to move forward, and we will continue to work with stakeholders and interest groups in doing so.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's in stark contrast to what the people on the floor are saying, even at your public meeting yesterday. Will you reverse the cuts until the PDD community is working with a plan they helped to create?

Mr. Oberle: I'll say again that the plans that we have for transformational change in the persons with developmental disabilities program have been made in consultation with stakeholders and interest groups. Mr. Speaker, we're going to keep moving ahead.

Dr. Swann: Transformational change. Will you at least take a step back and delay the July 1 implementation date?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, we will take a step forward and provide the care that is right for persons with developmental disabilities. I'll say again that we will continue to work with stakeholders and interest groups in doing so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Collective Bargaining with Teachers

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's deal for Alberta's doctors saw them receive \$68 million in cash. This \$68 million payout – fair enough – to the Alberta Medical Association represents more than a 2 per cent increase for doctors. In 2014-15 doctors will receive a 2.5 per cent increase while the teachers get zero per cent. My question is to the Education minister. Why is this government giving raises to doctors but not to teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this deal is great for doctors and great for patients, and the teachers' deal is great for teachers and great for students. It's consistent with the doctors' deal. It's consistent with what our Finance minister came out with in the third quarter with respect to freezing the public sector and reducing the size of our opted out in our management by 10 per cent. There is in all those deals three years of zeros. Within every deal there are some nuances, and the \$68 million is one with the doctors, but certainly there are similar nuances with the teachers' deal and certain top-ups, including a bonus of 1 per cent in the fourth year.

Mr. Eggen: Well, sometimes those zeros exist in different places and sometimes in the distant past.

Given that the doctors receive a 2.5 per cent increase at the start of next year and assurances as well that they will have a greater role in the development of Alberta's primary care – fair enough – and given that the parade of broken PC education promises, however, sees teachers being asked to accept a freeze of their wages, school improvement programs being cut, school boards predicting layoffs, this from a government that promised stable, predictable funding for our schools, my question again to the Education minister: why is this government willing to give a fair deal to doctors but not so much to teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the math adds up over there, but three zeros on my left hand and three zeros on my right hand seems to be pretty balanced to me. If you want to argue about which year it is or what year it starts and what year it ends, we can get into those semantics, but both of these deals are three zeros. Certainly, the doctors are good partners in the health system, and the minister has recognized that. Some of the things that we put in the teachers' deal with respect to the teacher development committee, funding a province-wide study on workload: all those things are nuances that are important for teachers, good for teachers, and at the end of the day good for our students.

The Speaker: Hon. members from the Wildrose and the Liberals, please keep the conversations out in the hallways. Don't bring them in here right now. It's just disruptive, and it's not necessary. Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that these broken promises to Alberta's teachers and students will result in fewer teachers and larger class sizes and given that the minister is trying to off-load the cost of this government's broken promises straight onto teachers, school boards, and parents, my question is again to the minister. Are Alberta's schools and teachers really such a low priority that he can make significant cuts, break promises, and then try to force a bad deal onto teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I have to give a lot of credit to the ATA and the school boards that worked very hard on this deal for close to three years. At the end of that, this deal is in line with what we're doing in health care, it's in line with what we're doing with the entire public sector, and it is good for kids. At the end of the day that's what's important.

This government is moving forward under this Premier to fulfilling a lot of the promises we made, including the \$107 million that went back into education, including the Education Act that was passed, including getting a deal done with teachers, including getting 120 capital projects out the door, which we're working on. The PATs and the full-day K is coming. Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Carbon Offset Verification Process

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta created one of the first carbon offset markets. This market makes up more than half of Alberta's greenhouse gas reduction claims. Our Premier boasts about this market internationally. The world is watching. Now we find out that companies selling carbon offsets are not delivering on these contracts. Failure to deliver on contracts in any market is a criminal offence. When will this government clamp down and hold these fraudulent companies accountable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the hon. member raised this issue because that just proves that our process is working in Alberta. We have an audit process for the offset credits, and we catch those that fall through the cracks. The process and the system are working. We have 34 offset protocols, and he is speaking of one of the 34 protocols, to which we continue to make improvements, with the Auditor General's advice.

Mr. Anglin: Sixty per cent failure.

Given that the Auditor General twice reported, once in 2009 and once again in 2011, that there are significant credibility issues with the market verification process and given that one company released all its clients from its contractual obligations because the verification process is in shambles, when will this government make the process transparent, protect the market, and hold these fraudulent companies accountable?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, we are working with the Auditor General and taking the advice of the Auditor General. We have made significant changes to the tillage offset program. That's the one offset the member is talking about. We have done a detailed rewrite of the tillage protocol. We have changes to the verification guidelines and processes, extensive outreach and communication with the offset community and project developers and regulated industry. We are working with the Auditor General to improve this system. It's a new system in Alberta, and we're making the changes that need to be made.

Mr. Anglin: Given that Alberta agriculture's website is posting a warning not to do business with a certain company selling carbon offsets because they're defaulting on their contracts and they actually suggest farmers should seek legal counsel, given that the same company is still registered on the ESRD's registry website selling bogus carbon contracts and defaulting on those contracts, can the Minister of ESRD – I don't know – Agriculture, Justice, someone get their head out of the sand and do something about this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member likes to talk about one offset out of the 34 that isn't working, but if I could, I'd like to talk about the other 33 offsets. Qualification protocol for energy efficiency: eight projects, 920,000 tonnes reduced. Direct reductions of changes for forest harvesting: one project, 600,000 tonnes reduced. Acid gas injection: nine projects, over a million tonnes reduced. Enhanced oil recovery: seven projects, 1.7 million tonnes reduced. Landfill gas capture: two projects, 657 tonnes reduced.

Mr. Speaker, I'm only halfway through. I could go on and on. This is what Alberta does in this system.

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

Cultural Sensitivity in the Delivery of Services

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In one of my recent community consultation workshops held in Calgary, a passionate young immigrant mother shared a touching story that almost brought our audience to tears. It was a story of her struggle in meeting the needs of her disabled children on top of the additional language and cultural barriers of her family. It compounded the complexity of the issues that she's struggling with. She was in a state of despair and literally crying for help. Apparently, in her struggle she was not alone. Our current support system in this area lacks capacity to provide culturally sensitive services to families with disabilities. To the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities: what is your department prepared to do to address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you I'd like to thank that hon. member for the question and for his advocacy for constituents. We have in the department indeed heard of occasions from parents or caregivers where services provided to children with disabilities were not in accordance with their cultural needs, including the language of origin. We're working on that through partnerships with cultural agencies and with providing training. For example, we now provide cultural awareness training to our family supports for children with disabilities programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the high volume of new immigrants coming to our province year after year, how do you plan on collaborating, with your services working with immigrant-serving agencies to provide comprehensive, sensitive services in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work with hundreds of community partners and agencies in the province, including agencies that provide services for immigrants and support to new families in our province, to address specific needs. For example, we're currently collaborating with the Chinese community in Calgary to build cultural understanding for our own staff, not just to train our own staff but to increase the number of Chinese nationals that are involved in services and service provision in our province.

Mr. Luan: Thank you. That's very encouraging.

A last but very specific question. In this year's budget a 4 per cent funding increase has been given to the family support for children with disabilities program. My question to the same associate minister: will you designate a portion of that increased funding to address the cultural competency issue?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, what we find in this is that every community and every situation is different, and I'm not prepared to provide hard targets. We do, however, provide flexibility to our agencies in how they use that funding. We already know that they make every effort to tailor their services in a culturally appropriate manner and provide language training and cultural awareness training directly to their staff, and we'll continue to encourage that to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Support for Cattle Producers

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Over the last year the cattle industry has taken quite a hit, and now there are rumblings that the loan guarantee program is being eliminated in this year's back-in-debt budget. Can the minister please guarantee Alberta cattle feeders that this program will not be pulled now or in future budgets under his time as agriculture minister?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Of course, I look forward to my estimates coming up on Monday. I know the hon. member will be there, and we can have a fulsome conversation about that and other issues then. But for now I'll just say that there are currently no plans to make changes to

this 70-year-old program, which has done great things for beef producers in the province, and we expect it will continue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've received many phone calls on the recent changes to the AgriStability program, can the minister please explain to this House how these changes are going to affect the ranchers and commit to engaging the industry on this information?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I spent a good part of my summer last year out consulting with producers, including cattle producers, and one thing that I heard and one thing that I think ministers are hearing across the country is that there's an important need to change our focus a little bit towards research, innovation, and market development. That's what the Growing Forward 2 agreement, which was just recently signed, has done. However, there's also a strong recommitment to support what exists and develop new insurance programs, including livestock price insurance programs, in Alberta and elsewhere.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is your department doing to promote the future of the cattle industry in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections]
Hon. members, the minister has the floor.

Mr. Olson: I'd like to thank the member for the question. I mean that sincerely because agriculture is a very important industry to Alberta, and any chance we get to talk about it – I know that he's passionate about it, and so am I. Every day my department is working on all kinds of things to help cattle producers. I have a meeting right after this ends to talk to cattle producers. My department is very actively engaged in hearing what their concerns are, and we're trying to address them as we go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Child Care Accreditation Funding

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The quality funding grant was put in place in 2003 to encourage child care programs to become involved in accreditation. This accreditation funding grant helped operators meet accreditation standards by offsetting the cost of toys, equipment, and programming resources. However, it was just announced that the quality funding grant would be eliminated as of April 1, 2013. This will put a great deal of pressure on the child care centres in my constituency of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, where people pay up to \$400 per month more than Edmonton or Calgary. To the Minister of Human Services: can the minister explain the rationale behind the change to the way child care centres are funded in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, as the hon. member indicated, the grant was put in place in 2003 to encourage daycares and day home operators to move to a level of accreditation that would seem to be appropriate for the children in our province that are in child care. In fact, we've been very successful in that. We have over 97 per cent of the daycares and

87 per cent of the out of school care programs seeking or having already obtained that accreditation. So the program has been successful. It was never intended to be a permanent grant. Daycares are expected to continue to maintain the level of accreditation. We wanted to move them there, and we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that these child care centres need to maintain that accreditation, how can they continue to maintain it if they don't have this funding incentive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With every business, of course, they have to invest in themselves and their programs and their equipment, but we continue to invest in Alberta's children as we do wage top-ups up to \$6.62 an hour for accredited staff. We provide professional development for staff, a thousand dollars per year. We do a staff attraction incentive allowance up to \$5,000 over two years to help daycares attain accredited staff and keep accredited staff and keep them current. We're focusing on the staff for the children, and we expect the daycares to invest in maintaining the quality of their equipment.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Is there any other assistance available for these programs to offset the staffing challenges that we constantly face in Wood Buffalo?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, in the north and particularly in the Wood Buffalo area there are higher costs, and to compensate for higher costs of living in that region, on top of the funding that I mentioned, we provide a northern allowance of \$1,040 per month for child care staff working in daycares, out of school cares, and family day home agencies in the Fort McMurray region, and approved family day home providers receive \$208 per month. Staff also get an additional \$500 per year to support professional development for a total of \$1,500 per year. We recognize the additional costs in that area. We're supporting those costs and those individuals. It's critical that we maintain the accreditation of those daycare spaces, not just in Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo but all across the province, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 30 seconds from now we will resume with private members' statements, beginning with Calgary-Hawkwood and following up with whoever is next.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Postgraduate Internships

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour to address you again. As Albertans we can be so proud of having world-class

postsecondary institutions in our province that provide our youth with the necessary skills and the knowledge to prepare them to succeed in the real world. We're also truly blessed to have great teachers and professors who dedicate their lives to the education of our children. For that, I am extremely thankful.

Mr. Speaker, as important as our primary school system is, I believe there is another important aspect to our education that is not given the credit or exposure that it deserves. That is the internship programs that give our students opportunities to apply their learning in real-life experiences. Through these opportunities recent university graduates and current students are given the chance to showcase their talents in the work setting and gain first-hand practical experiences which are second to none.

Here in Alberta I'm very proud to say that our government has established numerous programs in this area. One such is called the Washington Center-Alberta internship partnership. Funded in part by our government, this program gives students and recent graduates the opportunity to work in Washington, DC, at prestigious institutions such as the United States Senate, the *Washington Post*, and the United States Department of the Treasury.

It is my hope that we can continue to promote and maintain such internships to assist in the professional development of our young adults. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the imaginary bitumen bubble, the unicorn of Alberta politics, this government has backed away from virtually all of its election promises. An unfortunate casualty of this unicorn bubble was the funding for safe communities, promised on page 5 of the PC election platform. The Servants Anonymous facilitated exit, or SAFE, house in Calgary is facing imminent closure on June 30 as a result of this government's misguided priorities. This program provides comprehensive long-term services for women and their children looking to exit prostitution, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. To date it has helped 176 women, each one somebody's daughter, somebody's sister, somebody's loved one, escape the sex trade and recover from the inherent violence and trauma inflicted upon them.

The cost to taxpayers of supporting these women was \$211,000 a year, roughly the same as just one member of the Premier's ever-growing communications staff. The return on investment is phenomenal. For every \$1 invested in SAFE house, it saved taxpayers \$8 in justice, health, and other social costs. The minister said that funding was always temporary and part of a pilot program, Mr. Speaker, so correct me if I'm wrong here. If pilot programs are working, we should keep them. That's the point of pilot programs. You scrap the ones that don't work, and you keep the ones that do. This one was working. It received referrals from every city in the province. It is working closely with various police forces to facilitate these exits.

Mr. Speaker, when courageous women make the decision to flee, their government should be there to support them. Instead, this government has turned their backs on them, perpetrating the same betrayal they live through daily and are trying to escape. This decision is ignorant, cold, and just plain wrong, but it's not too late to change. I implore the government and the members opposite to reconsider.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to present part 2 of the pheasant release sustainability program petition. With this group of 516 signatures we now have over a thousand signatures from Albertans who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to take the necessary measures, including the introduction of proposed amendments to existing legislation, to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the Pheasant Release Program, which has been an important part of Alberta's hunting tradition, heritage and culture for over 65 years.

The Speaker: Hon. member, can I assume that was vetted past Parliamentary Counsel as to form?

Mrs. Jablonski: Correct. It has been reviewed and approved in format by Parliamentary Counsel.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings here this afternoon. I have, first of all, 50 or more copies of some e-mail submissions that have been sent to the Premier and CCed to me as well in regard to the Michener Centre. Submissions like these clearly show that to keep open the Michener Centre is a very large priority for Albertans, and the government is out of touch with their suggestions that they would do otherwise.

The second tabling I have is the appropriate amount of copies of e-mail submissions that were made to our budget tour, the NDP budget tour, which visited seven cities in February. We have people making very pointed comments in regard to restoring funding to health care facilities and especially long-term care facilities, again showing how this budget is a broken-promises budget, and Albertans don't accept it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, Cardston-Taber-Warner, and Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the expenses related to the health executive who has been discussed in question period today, including the receipts paid to the Mayo Clinic in addition to numerous lunches, dinners, snacks, and coffees, accommodation at the Rochester Marriott as well as the airport transfers, for a total in excess of \$7,000.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from Jim and Barbara Steel, and they are very concerned about changes to the aids to daily living program for Albertans needing oxygen and respiratory services. They're worried about rising costs and less service due to these changes.

My second tabling is from Ms Aileen Jang, a pharmacist concerned about the changes to the generic drug prices and the

pharmacy changes that are coming down the pike.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I understand you have six separate tablings.

Mr. Bikman: I do.

The Speaker: Can you do them all at once, please?

Mr. Bikman: I'll be quick.

The Speaker: Okay.

2:50

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an excellent epistle here from Taria Gouw, a pharmacist in her hometown of Bow Island, chronicling the problems being created by the Minister of Health's changes to generic drug pricing. It's recommended reading. I gave it five stars.

Secondly, from Wayne Smith, a pharmacist in Raymond, on what he perceives as evidence of misinformation and incompetence with regard to the generic drug pricing.

From Dennis Strong from Wood's Dispensary in Lethbridge, posing 12 questions on pharmacy in Alberta.

I have the Alberta Pharmacists Association March 27 fact sheet about the impact of Alberta generic price reductions. It's sort of a myth-and-facts comparison, quite fascinating.

From grandparents Janny and Joop Harthoorn from Coaldale about the abrupt termination of funding of plant operation and maintenance at two independent schools.

From Raymond irrigation district general manager Gordon ZoBell, providing more information on Crown lands that will be protected by the requested main canal spillway that we all feel is so important in my area of southern Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of tablings with regard to little Brooke Aubuchon, whom we talked about yesterday. The five-year-old child is dying from Batten disease. There is no cure or treatment for Batten disease. "Ultimately, Batten disease children become blind, bedridden, and demented . . . [and] the disease often claims the very young." The article goes on to talk about her struggle, about the financial challenges her family faces, and goes on to state that the provincial government will not help the family with the costs to go to New York, as stated by Bart Johnson, the press secretary for the Minister of Health. I would encourage everybody to read it because clearly she's not a health executive.

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. Lukaszuk, Deputy Premier and Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education, pursuant to the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act the Alberta Economic Development Authority activity report 2012.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we now have a point of order, which the hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition raised

around 1:40 p.m. I'm going to ask him to elaborate now, probably starting with his citation and carrying on from there.

Point of Order

Speaking Rotation in Estimates Consideration

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, my initial citation comes from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* on page 4. It is Content and Sources of Parliamentary Procedure. Under section 3, the Constitution Act, it says:

The whole concept of the parliamentary Question Period depends on the tradition that the Cabinet is willing to submit its conduct of public affairs to the scrutiny of the Opposition on a regular basis.

Then it goes on to say:

More tentative are such traditional features as respect for the rights of the minority, which precludes a Government from using to excess the extensive powers that it has to limit debate or to proceed in what the public and the Opposition might interpret as unorthodox ways.

That's my initial citation for this, Mr. Speaker.

Let me explain the problem. The problem is that in the consideration of estimates by the three standing committees the chairs of the committees are interpreting the rules, particularly the allocation of time for the opposition, in different ways. That is why I am raising it here instead of in the committees. It's a question, first of all, of consistency, but most important to us are the ways that sometimes limit the ability of the opposition to do their job, which is to have scrutiny over the government's estimates and to ask questions as they stand.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity chairs Resource Stewardship, and the rules that she's following in terms of the sequence basically go through the opposition parties, followed by the government member, but then have a government member, then an Official Opposition member, then a government member, then I think Official Opposition again, then a government member, then the third party, then a government member, then the fourth party. So there's a very high participation of government members in the questioning of the estimates, and in that particular format the opposition gets less time to ask its questions than traditionally.

Now, the Member for Calgary-East chairs Economic Future, and his rotation is different. It goes: a government member, Official Opposition, then third party, then fourth party, then government member, and then allows all members equal opportunity. He allows in the second half an additional 20-minute period for the Official Opposition but not for the other opposition parties. I have the Blues from the meeting last night indicating that process.

As far as I'm aware, the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, who chairs Families and Communities, has the rotation that is more standard: the first hour to the Official Opposition, 20 minutes to the third party, 20 minutes to the fourth party, a government member 20 minutes, and then each party in turn has a chance.

Ms Notley: No.

Mr. Mason: No. I'm corrected on that.

Ms Notley: Then it's back and forth, government and opposition.

Mr. Mason: Then it's back and forth, government and opposition.

We have different procedures in each committee, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the role of the opposition in terms of estimates, I

would argue that this is not something that should be left to the discretion of individual chairs to decide in their own way how the questioning ought to proceed. In my view, it ought to be agreed upon, preferably by the House leaders, to have a systematic rotation that's used uniformly that respects the role of the opposition in providing scrutiny and respects the roles of all opposition parties in particular.

I have some other citations. Under *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 819, it says:

The direct control of national finance has been referred to as the "great task of modern parliamentary government." That control is exercised at two levels. First, Parliament must assent to all legislative measures which implement public policy and the House of Commons authorizes both the amounts and objects or destination of all public expenditures.

At page 820:

The basic components of parliamentary financial procedure may be succinctly described as follows:

Consolidated Revenue Fund . . .

Royal Recommendation . . .

Supply: the process by which the government submits its projected annual expenditures (the estimates) for parliamentary approval.

Borrowing authority . . .

Ways and means . . .

Public Accounts . . .

At page 831 *House of Commons* recognizes

two contradictory principles: that the government is entitled to get its financial legislation through Parliament; and that the opposition is entitled to identify, draw attention to, delay, and debate, items that it feels need attention and discussion.

It's that area that I think the opposition has been prevented in some cases from doing.

Mr. Speaker, I've been advised by my House leader that all opposition House leaders felt that they had agreed to something different than is currently happening. Overall, the outcome is that the opposition now has less time to scrutinize government expenditures and to ask questions than they have in previous years.

I get back to the basic point that I made at the beginning, from page 4 of *Beauchesne's*, which is

respect for the rights of the minority, which precludes a Government from using to excess the extensive powers that it has to limit debate or to proceed in what the public and the Opposition might interpret as unorthodox ways.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you rule on two things. First of all, the chairs of the committees must have a uniform system of rotation for the questions, and that rotation must include adequate time for all opposition parties to ask questions with respect to this. In some cases, for those departments where the shortest amount of time has been allocated, an opposition member might have seven minutes to ask their questions and in terms of time may not get another opportunity to ask questions. That's far from satisfactory, and I believe that it interferes with the ability of the opposition, particularly the smaller opposition parties, to do their job.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Alberta Liberals.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are trying a slightly different version of the estimates this year. The government has been quite insistent that we move away from a Committee of Supply situation, where the estimates are debated here in the House and using a common system there. We have moved into debating the estimates in committees, in this particular

case into debating all of the estimates in the legislative policy committees.

We, the three House leaders, believed that we had an understanding of what the rotation would be. That has not come to fruition. I will note that there are a number of cases where we, the Assembly, or indeed possibly in committee decide the way we want to conduct our business. That trumps what we find in the supposedly higher orders of parliamentary procedure, for example *Beauchesne* and parliamentary procedure in the House of Commons. There are a number of places where that happens. We disagree with what they're saying, but it's our rules, and we get to play by them when we all agree. That happens in a couple of different cases I'll just raise.

Minority reports are an example. We allow them. The House of Commons wouldn't or not in the same way. In the House of Commons they allow consideration of estimates. In the committees we don't. There are two examples of where we've written our own rules, and we agree to abide by them. Where our standing rules are silent, we default to these higher authorities in trying to figure out how to conduct our business.

Now, what's happened is that in our standing orders under – oh, my God, I've moved my page. Sorry. I had it marked, and now I'm going to be fishing.

An Hon. Member: Page 35?

Ms Blakeman: No. I'm looking under the delegation to the policy committees and how the rotation will work, so I think that's going to turn up on . . .

Mr. Hancock: Page 37, 59.01(6).

Ms Blakeman: At 59.01(6). Thank you. That's it. That's really good. Thank you very much, Government House Leader.

We have very specifically set out how we will do it in the first three hours of debate or slightly less than the first three hours, a very specific rotation. At the end of that it says, "Any Member may speak thereafter," which would be 59.01(6)(f). What that doesn't give us is the rotation of any member. What's happened is that we could have the designated critic sitting in the committee. They have been substituted in in order to have voice and vote and the ability to move motions, and they're recognized, but then in the next go-round any member can and has been recognized as being another member of that particular party but not the critic themselves.

What we're missing here is the specificity on how the rotation goes. I would argue that the rotation should repeat the rotation that's already agreed to. We would go back to a specified amount of time for the Official Opposition party, a shorter amount for the third and fourth parties. That's not what's happening. As my colleague has pointed out, what we have is an inconsistency between the three committees, and everybody is doing it differently.

Now, there is often argument in this House about the privilege and respect due to opposition members and the role they hold, that is specific to opposition as compared to government back-benchers. I have been reviewing that, Mr. Speaker, and I note that in the House of Commons it quite specifically recognizes the importance of the opposition in holding the government to account and specifically states certain committees of which they will be the chair. I think that shows us – well, it definitely demonstrates the holding to account of the government by the Official Opposition, specifically around money.

Of the four committees, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is example number one. We follow that in this particular Assembly because the chairperson of Public Accounts is a member of the Official Opposition. The Parliament adds in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, and, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, so the committee to which the estimates are referred in our House of Commons, and that is also chaired by a member of the Official Opposition, which underlines again the importance and special duty that opposition members have to hold the government to account when it comes to estimates and public accounts.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on pages 1036 and 1037 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* the standing orders specify that the chair is a member of the Official Opposition, the vice-chair is a member of government, and the second vice-chair is a member of another opposition party. That's how important it is for opposition members to hold the government to account with its past financial obligations in public accounts and future by way of estimates.

The other thing I find very interesting, Mr. Speaker, appears on page 1030, which is about the duties and powers of chairs, vice-chairs, and acting chairs. Now, it says that chairs are very important. In fact, when there is not a chairperson available for a committee, no business is done until there's a chairperson that is in place. I note that they must follow what the committee has decided or what has been referred to them from the House. Specifically, on page 1030 under procedural responsibilities it says that they, meaning the chairs, "ensure that any rules established by the committee" – I'll underline that and put my emphasis on it – "including those on the apportioning of speaking time, are respected."

Now, we did not vote in the committees on what the apportioning would be. That partial instruction – and I say that it's partial – came from the House when they approved the changes to the standing orders. It is partial because it does not give us the second rotation or part 2 or the second at-bat or however you want to describe it. We have a new system of doing things this year, where we expanded the amount of time that was assigned to certain ministries, and that was agreed upon. Those ministries are, for the most part, getting six hours, a three-hour piece and a three-hour piece.

We have a designation available in our standing orders that sets out the rotation for part 1, for the first section, and that is what appears on pages 36 and 37 in Standing Order 59.01(6) and everything that follows. You've got the minister for 10 minutes, the Official Opposition for an hour, 20 minutes for the third party, 20 minutes for the fourth party, 20 minutes for the government members, and then this very unhelpful part (f), "any Member may speak thereafter." Now, what we don't have here is a specific rotation, and that is our complaint in this particular case. We've been given not enough information to make decisions on it, and unfortunately the chairs of the committees have also not been provided with adequate information and instruction to be able to carry out their duties.

As a result, we've got three different chairs with three different decisions, we're asking people to operate in an inconsistent manner between the committees, and we have, I believe, abdicated our responsibility to recognize and uphold the particular duties that opposition members have to hold the government to account, which I believe I have explained through the quotations that I've already given you.

3:10

We are asking – and I will echo my colleague the leader of the fourth party and the NDP caucus – that this should be resolved, that all parties should be consistent, and I believe that the rotation should go back and repeat the rotation that we've already agreed on: more time for the Official Opposition and a pro-rated amount of time for the third-party and fourth-party oppositions, ditto for the government members. Then we can start that rotation over again.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to run through that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to bring those points to you.

Mr. Anderson: Well, what more can be said after a very, very thorough analysis? I concur and agree with the analyses both by the New Democratic leader as well as the Member for Edmonton-Centre, the House leader for the Liberals. I won't go over those same points, but I do want to raise a couple of brief points in that it has become definitely, in my view, below the standards of what we should practise in this House to have three different sets of rules for these committees that are discussing the budget estimates. I think that's just common sense. It's very clear that we should have the same set of rules when we're discussing the budget and the budget estimates. I think that makes sense. Everyone is on the same page. Everyone knows what's coming. Everyone can prepare.

I remember that in the first round, before we even knew what the chairs were going to do, we prepared as if we were going to do as the House leader for the Liberals said, that we would go Official Opposition, third party, fourth party, government member, Official Opposition, third party, fourth party, government member, and we'd go like that. So we prepared accordingly, only to have that not be the case when we got there.

This has become a bone of contention. Again, I think our House can do better. We can set a higher standard for fairness and consistency because it looks very arbitrary right now, and it certainly is not serving the interests of the public. I mean, I think we can see that questions from the opposition side are, shall we put it, mildly more probing than ones from the government side. [interjections] I know some might take exception to that, but the point is that our job as the Official Opposition and the third and fourth parties is to hold the government to account, specifically on issues of money, and we should have that.

Now, the second point is with regard to the agreement that we thought was made. I'm not going to undermine the character of the Government House Leader in any way, shape, or form. I'm going to say that there was a misunderstanding there. But it was very clearly my understanding as well as that of the other two members, as we discussed, that indeed we had agreed to an hour for the Official Opposition after 10 minutes for the government, followed by 20 minutes for the third and then the fourth parties and the government, and then it would switch to 10 minutes in the same order – Wildrose, Liberal, ND, government, and so forth – and around, around, around we go. That's what all three of us thought we had agreed to.

The reason that we remember the conversation is because the Official Opposition actually requested that in the second three-hour block for some of these larger ministries, Mr. Speaker, we would get either another hour or another half an hour at the very least, and then it would be pro-rated for the third and fourth parties so that we could do our jobs as Official Opposition for the next three hours. That was said no to, and then my recollection is that we agreed it would just be 10 minutes in the same order.

However, I'm absolutely going to give the benefit of the doubt to the Government House Leader that there was a miscommunication there. So we'll need to do a better job in making sure that as we go forward, we have a clear written understanding of what was agreed to because it was very, very frustrating on that first night to hear something different.

There were several allusions to Public Accounts and how we conduct things in Public Accounts. Let's be clear. The government members control the Public Accounts Committee. As the Official Opposition House Leader and the Finance critic I'm the chair of that committee, but there are more government members on that committee. When we were negotiating the time slots for Public Accounts, I was really, frankly, limited on what I could do. I had to do something that the government members would agree to. There were negotiations in that regard. I certainly put on the table, first, that the Official Opposition should have more time. However, we came through negotiation to an agreement that everybody could live with and, more importantly, that the government majority could live with.

In the Public Accounts Committee the government actually goes first. That, I think, could be improved upon somewhat, but that, again, was part of the negotiation. The government goes first, followed by the Wildrose, and actually the government gets the most time. They get exactly half of the time. The Wildrose gets a quarter of the time, and the last quarter is split between the ND and Liberal caucuses. Could there be improvements there? Yeah, but that will be up to the government majority because the government majority rules on that committee.

I do not think we should take Public Accounts as some sort of precedent on how these other committees should be run. That's a separate negotiation, and it's a separate committee, and it's for a separate purpose. Public Accounts is an important committee, but of course going over the budget estimates is critical. It's a critical part of the process, and it should be treated as a separate vehicle from any other committee of the House, I would say. I think it's very important that we not think that that should be the precedent.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would also ask that a process be outlined for making sure that we have one set of rules that we can all prepare for for the remainder of the estimates period. Then perhaps we House leaders can get together and make sure that that's clear for the next round next year so that we have uniform rules and that within those rules for the remaining time here adequate time is given in the rotation to the opposition parties so that they have the majority of time necessary and needed to do their job, which is to hold the government accountable.

A final point, Mr. Speaker. There's some discussion that I hear at some of these committees that the opposition should feel very fortunate and very warm and fuzzy inside and grateful to the government for the extra three hours given to some of the larger ministries. I personally think that that's a little overboard. To examine the Health estimates, for example, in three hours, with the opposition getting roughly half the time during that three hours to examine a \$17 billion Health budget and so forth, and some of the larger ministries is frankly a little bit insane. I'm glad that we've extended it to a more reasonable time, but the problem is that with the new rotation it works out that actually the opposition gets very little more time if at all in some cases. It's certainly less as a proportion of the total time because of the way that they've done the rotation in the second three hours.

Again, I would say that that argument is a red herring, and it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Our job is to hold the government accountable. We should have the time to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it is necessary for me to speak up at this point as a member of one of these committees and as a member of the government. I believe that it is my right as an MLA to speak on behalf of my constituents and to ask questions at these very important meetings. Now, unfortunately, there are 12 members of the government caucus that are a part of this committee. We are a part of that committee, okay? If in those second three hours we do a rotation, nine of us get to speak. Only nine out of the 12 get to speak. As a private member I think that I do have the right. If we do change this, that does impact me and my ability to represent my constituents.

Thank you very much.

3:20

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and I believe we have Calgary-Varsity and Calgary-Fish Creek, and at some point we're going to have to hear from the Government House Leader. This is getting a little bit long. Let's go very briefly here. We have a 3:30 main estimates meeting to get to, and I'd like to deal with this matter before then.

Briefly, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: I will be very brief because many of the points have already been made. I just want to as a House leader concur with my other House leader colleagues about our understanding with respect to how the second piece of the extended estimates was to unfold. Mr. Speaker, I ask you to consider this. Would we have asked for more time only to hand it over to the government? Clearly, the answer is no.

The long and the short of this is that if this is not resolved, the outcome is that under this new government with this new Premier in this new Assembly the opposition members will get significantly less time to address the budget debate. That is a problem for democracy, and that is a step backward from the process that we have engaged in over the previous four years. That is why it requires the attention of this whole Assembly for us to make a determination on whether or not that is the direction we want to go in.

As for the member who just spoke, I would just like to note that at no time does our caucus get anywhere close to nine opportunities to speak to the budget. Under no circumstances. We don't get to sit in caucus with the government and talk about the budget. That is why our parliamentary system sets up a different process for the opposition.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, do you have something new to add? Can you be very brief, please?

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I am the deputy chair of one of the committees, and I'm fortunate to be able to work with the chair of our committee, that is willing to work with the deputy chair of the committee. That's the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. We established the rotating process of how we were going to conduct our business during the questions, and I think he needs to be commended for what we were able to work forward on at the beginning of the process, as we started.

What has been interesting to me is the fact that – I was quite taken aback – when I sat in some of the other committees, the process was different. I'm thinking: "Well, did we make up something? Were we out of sync, or maybe they were out of

sync?" So I went to my House leader, and I said: maybe you can let me know how this is working. He reiterated that what the chair and I were doing for Families and Communities was the process that was originally agreed on with the House leader. It has worked out well. We've had no complaints from any of the members on our committee that I'm aware of.

You know, as a former member of the government who used to be able to go through the budget process – it gives the government members the opportunity to ask questions during the budget process as they're getting their budgets ready. Quite frankly, they also have the opportunity – and I used to have the opportunity – to go down and sit down with a particular minister and say: "You know, I'm uneasy about what we're establishing on this process. Maybe you can explain it, and we can talk." I think that's one of the nice things about being in government.

It's fascinating. When I listened to the Premier as she was running for the leadership, she talked about democracy, she talked about leadership, and she talked about how she was going to establish these committees and how she was going to do things differently in the committee process. We started to see some of that as we started this committee process. With the former member for Lethbridge-East we started strategizing on the priorities of the committee and the government in regard to what we were going to talk about. She's not there, and we miss her because we had started on how we were going to deal with mental health and things like that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think it's incumbent for all of the committees to run the same way. I think it's important for the government to carry through with what they've said that they were going to do, and that's in regard to democracy and giving people the ability to have the appropriate time. We're discussing tonight a \$17 billion budget, and I have to agree with the House leader of the Wildrose that that's a ton of money to be only able to talk about it for a limited time. Amongst my colleagues on the committee we've decided how we are going to strategize that. I know the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park will have the same agreement as we started with.

This has to be fixed. It has to be the same for all of the committees. We're going into estimates at 3:30, as you've alluded to. We're going into estimates tonight. We have probably about 12 doctors that are going to be at the meeting tonight, that are wanting to hear what the Official Opposition has to say in regard to the budget process, so a ruling needs to be made.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Can we conclude, then, with the hon. Government House Leader on this matter? Then I'll have listened to everyone's concerns from all four parties, and I'll be prepared to make a ruling.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, you know, there's been a lot of discussion on this but very little on the actual point of order. I would submit first of all that there is no point of order. Standing Order 65(2)(b) is very clear. "The Chair [in the committee] shall maintain order in standing and special committees and shall decide all questions of order subject to an appeal to the committee." There's nothing in the standing orders about the speaking process. Standing Order 59.01(6)(f) says, "Any Member may speak thereafter." The order of speaking is then up to the chair, and if the committee doesn't like the way the chair is handling it, the committee can set that order. That's pretty clear in our standing orders. Nobody has overruled that. Nobody has changed that.

With all due respect to my House leader colleagues, there was no agreement. There obviously was a misunderstanding because each of the three people has come back and said: we thought we'd agreed. But I was very clear, I thought, in saying: no; we aren't going to start the rotation over again in the second three hours. We did not come to any conclusion with respect to the rotation. I went back and clearly checked my notes and other notes that were made at that meeting to be sure of that point. I don't think I've lost my faculties. I appreciate where the Opposition House Leader left it. There was clearly a misunderstanding, but on my part there was no agreement to change the normal rotation that we use with respect to this, and that is back and forth between opposition and government.

Now, I also went back, as I said I would, to the opposition House leaders when they pressed the point. I know you won't believe this, but I actually went back and looked at past committees over past years and confirmed that, in fact, the rotation of back and forth between an opposition questioning the government and then a private member on the government side questioning the government is exactly the way it's happened in committee before. I went back and read about five different committees to find that. I didn't read them all. I did a sampling.

Now, there have been a number of myths that have been put forward. One of those myths is that the custom is that we go through the rotation. That is a myth. We have not actually gone through that rotation.

Another myth is that we're taking away from the process, that we're changing the process away from a Committee of Supply process. This House over my 15 years has used about 15 different processes. We've always tried to find a better way to do it. Some of those processes have involved utilization of some departments coming into Committee of Supply. I think I can only remember about one year where we did most of them in Committee of Supply. Almost all of them have been in either A, B, C, D committees or two committees sitting in the evening or, you know, some form of committee process, including a Friday morning four-hour committee to recognize the designated departments. There have been many different processes, but all of them with the exception of maybe one year have involved committees of the House, not committees of the whole House but subcommittees of the House, hearing estimates. So it's a myth that we're moving it away from Committee of Supply.

One of the most important pieces to address here is the role of a member in the House. Previous Speakers, Mr. Speaker, your predecessors, have always upheld the importance of the individual member in the House being able to participate, and I would hope and trust that you will uphold that as well. Every member is elected to serve their constituents. Some of us have the privilege of being asked to also serve in government and to be members of Executive Council. All members of the House who are not in government and Executive Council have the duty and the obligation, the responsibility to serve their constituents by holding government to account in the Legislature. That is the fundamental and very elementary distinction between government and the Legislature.

3:30

We happen to be a parliamentary form of government, so the Executive Council actually sits in the House. To that extent, those of us who are privileged to serve as members of Executive Council and, therefore, of government do give up one of our roles, that of a private member holding government to account. Because we're members of government, we can't question ourselves, but no other member in the House is obliged to give up their

responsibility to their constituents or their obligation to serve their constituents by questioning government and holding government to account.

Yes, private members have other opportunities to help set policy, help set direction. That's one of the privileges they get for being on the winning team, to put it bluntly. They get to participate in setting policy at a higher level, but they do not, by virtue of getting that additional responsibility and that additional opportunity, give up their responsibility to serve their constituents by holding government to account. There should be no suggestion that the opposition are the sole purveyors of truth and light in terms of holding government to account. In fact, it is an obligation of every private member.

Now, there is a recognition of the enhanced role of the opposition, as the hon. House leader of the third party indicated, chairing a committee. In our particular case chairing the Public Accounts Committee is done by members of the opposition. The fact of the matter is that we give the Official Opposition the leadoff role – when I say “we,” I mean the House, not the government – and the larger role at the front end of estimates in order to pursue their role as the Official Opposition and, obviously, the front-end role in question period. They have more questions than private members do to hold government to account in question period.

So there is a recognition of their role, but it's not an abdication of the total role to opposition, nor should it be, nor can it be in a parliamentary democracy. I would certainly want to refute any allegation or suggestion by the Opposition House Leader that their questions are mildly more probing. They're neither mild nor probing. [interjection] Because I've heard your questions, and they're neither mild nor probing.

In fact, if you go through the estimates on Human Services, you'll find that many of the interchanges with government members were equally if not more probing than those of the opposition. No private member in the House has a lock on probing questions, and I would certainly hold up private members on the government side as being equal to or better than any other questions that come forward.

This new process has not afforded less time to ask questions than traditionally, as the leader of the fourth party indicated. In fact, traditionally this House – and this is the first time for a long time that we've deviated from it – has afforded three hours per department. With 18 departments, including Executive Council, that's 54 hours. I believe, if my math is correct, that we actually have 78 hours this year. So we're not giving less time; rather, we're giving more time. That was a wrong statement.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I need to go on any longer. The point of the fact is that the chairs of committees under Standing Order 65(2)(b) set the standard in their committees. The Member for Calgary-Varsity, who is chair of one of the committees, had intended to speak, but she has to chair a committee that probably has been called to order already. She's indicated to me in discussion – I think she wouldn't mind my representing that here – that she has established with her committee a pattern over the process, which they've adhered to and are continuing to adhere to now. That's their committee. That's the pattern that they have, and they're adhering to it. Nobody, actually, has challenged her on it, that I'm aware of, by raising a point of order. If there was . . . [interjections] Well, if the point of order was raised there and dealt with, then this is absolutely functus unless somebody has appealed it to here, and there's been no appeal to here that I'm aware of.

So there's no point of order. But even if there was a point of order, the fact of the matter is that we are operating in the way

we've always operated with respect to the process of committees, back and forth, with private members on both sides of the House having an important role in holding government to account. If you want to change that, we can always discuss it. We have discussed every year changes in the process.

But this House leader will never give up on the concept that every member of this House has an important role, to represent their constituents. Some of us, who are privileged to be in Executive Council, give up a little bit of that role because we cannot challenge our colleagues with respect to their departments, but we get to do that in cabinet and in cabinet committees.

In this House every member is important. Every member has an equal role to play, and no member gives up their privileges just because they're not in opposition. In the process of those committees as in the process of the House there has to be some respect of the fact that if you only have four members, you're going to have less time and less opportunity. That's just a fact of the numbers. If you only have five members, you're going to have less time, less opportunity. If you're fortunate enough to have achieved 17 members, you're going to have more time, and you get more time. On this side of the House there are actually, I think, 61 members, and they get time, too.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I want to begin by just saying that I find it somewhat unusual that this particular point of order would be brought into the House. It may well be a first in this context; I'm not sure. It'll be something for our historians and librarians to look through. Nonetheless, I allowed it to come forward because I found it quite interesting as we got into the debate and the discussion on it. We've now heard from six or seven different speakers from all four parties, so clearly there is a heightened level of interest in this regard.

I want to make a few points as I lead up to a declaration at the end here. First of all, the issue of the rotation of question period, as raised first and foremost by the hon. member who is the leader of the New Democrat opposition, is clearly pointed out in our standing orders. I think every person who spoke acknowledged that in one way or another. The issue isn't so much about what's specified in our standing orders. The issue is more about how it's applied. How are the rules that are specified adhered to and/or interpreted?

I was fascinated by what Calgary-Fish Creek had to say as a co-chair of one of these committees, where she works very well with the member from the government side who chairs the committee. They determine that particular rotation order based, presumably, on who is present and wishes to participate and on what the other confines or rules or regulations might be. As unusual as it might be for that point to come in here, I did find it interesting, as we got into the debate, how different people interpreted how that rotation works or, to their point, doesn't work.

When I listened to what Edmonton-Centre had to say, noting that she had spoken at some length during the debate on that issue in this Chamber weeks ago, I found it equally interesting about the understanding of what the rotation should be. I would agree with her, as I would agree with all seven speakers, that the rotation ought to be very clearly determined, but that is an issue that must be determined in the committee. Now that we have standing orders of our own and we have citations that were referenced from the House of Commons and perhaps elsewhere, it's really very clear. I would hope that the chairs of these committees would make it very clear at the beginning as to what that understanding of the rotation is just so that there isn't any confusion going forward.

The role of the chair of the committee is clearly specified as well. The chair is, in fact, in charge of order and decorum, and that includes the issue of rotation. Those of you who attend the meetings that I chair would know that I make it very clear what the speaking order is and who's up next and whether or not they have something fresh to say or whatever. It's not perfect, and I'm not claiming to be perfect either, but at least there's a clear understanding of how the process works and, going forward, who's up next.

3:40

Then I listened carefully to what the House leader for the Wildrose had to say on the opportunities for holding the government to account. There is no greater opportunity, as will be acknowledged by all, than the main estimates, where you actually can get into a to-and-fro with the minister or the Premier or whomever happens to be responding. That is the most fascinating time of all other than question period, perhaps, for some.

With respect to his comment about an agreement having to be made as to how procedures work in committee during estimates debates, I agree, but I understood that you had that particular agreement. If you don't, then it belongs in the committee stage now to determine at the outset. I'm hoping that that's what will happen going forward.

I heard other speakers comment as well, and I'll spare you the time, hon. members, before getting into any details on that.

Let me just begin my wrap-up here by saying the following. If there is a breach of the orders or the order of rotation during your committee estimates, that's the time to raise it. You raise it right then, right there. Let me add that we have had this process in place now since March 18, when the first estimates actually occurred. About 12 or so departments or ministries have already gone through the estimates process. We're well past the halfway mark. I would think that if there were any serious breaches in those committees, they would have been raised at an earlier opportunity, in the more proper venue, and that would be the committees themselves.

Secondly, if after you have raised an issue and the chair has ruled on it in the committee you don't like the ruling, there is an appeal process, which you're welcome to use as well. So I invite you to review how that works and where it exists. It is not the Speaker's role to entertain questions on matters that can and should be more properly raised in the committees, as I have just said, unless or until a report comes into the Assembly from that committee, perhaps as referred to the committee in the first place by this Assembly.

Furthermore, you know, the issue of the committees considering the estimates pursuant to the standing orders was amended by Government Motion 24 – I believe that's what it was – which was approved by this Assembly back on March 5. The amendments clearly gave the authority for the legislative policy committees to consider the estimates, and accordingly a schedule was tabled in this Assembly as to how that would work and which departments would come up and when and so on. The final day for all of these considerations of estimates, as you know, is this coming Monday.

Another point is that the chairs of these committees, who are responsible for the rotations, are able to communicate with their members privately if necessary to ensure that fairness and consistency are occurring. If they're not, then, individual members, it's your right as well to go to that chair or send a note to that chair, to bring it to someone's attention and see if it can be dealt with at the committee level first. The appropriate forum and time for a matter such as this is during those committee proceedings, as I've indicated.

Now, a couple of final points here, and we'll get on with the day. First of all, the Practical Guide is a wonderful document. This guide is seldom referred to, but I'll tell you that I've been through it, and it is an excellent document. I hold it to show it to you so that you will perhaps request a copy of it again. They were all sent out, but if you don't have one, please get one because here on page 30 is a wonderful section that talks all about procedure in committee. There's a lot to be gleaned from this, and there's a lot to be learned from this, and for some of us there are some wonderful reminders. Basically, it recaps exactly everything that I've just said up till now. I won't go through it all, but it talks to you about how standing orders are applied. It talks to you about the roles of the chair. It talks to you about the processes, appealing a chair's committee decision, about order and decorum, and so on. It is our guide. It is our guide for the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and I encourage you to please visit it.

Now, I'm going to end with this. The statements that have been made here have not fallen on deaf ears. We had a number of the committee chairs present when this was in fact discussed and debated over the last 45 minutes, and I'm sure that every committee chair, perhaps at the prompting of the Government

House Leader and other House leaders, will be paying much more careful attention to this. But I'm going to also suggest that we allow the standing orders to be properly enforced, as we know them to be, and that the procedure we have in place today be continued and be followed.

We have two main estimates debates coming up right now. Let's pay attention to how those two committees operate today, and let's know that all the committee chairs have a responsibility to communicate much more clearly and to communicate as consistently and as fairly as possible the interpretation of those standing orders.

I find no point of order on this matter today, and I'm hoping that going forward tonight and tomorrow and through to the conclusion, there will be a greater attention paid to the consistency and fairness of rotations and sequencing and that the abilities of all members to get up and represent their constituents and their own feelings with regard to estimates can in fact be heard and appreciated.

That concludes things for today.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:46 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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