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The 28th Legislature
First Session

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Issue 47

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Calahasen	Sandhu
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 17, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and guests, let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we so enjoy. We give further thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly let us rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country and particularly so because today is the anniversary of Canada's Constitution Act, 1982, an act that was signed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 31 years ago on this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly esteemed delegates from the Council of Arab League Ambassadors: His Excellency Smail Benamara, ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and dean of the Arab ambassadors, and his spouse, Mrs. Hasna Benamara; Her Excellency Nouzha Chekrouni, ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, and her spouse, El Menouar Bentefrit; His Excellency Abdulrahman Hamid Al-Hussaini, ambassador of the Republic of Iraq, and his spouse, Mrs. Adwiya Abdulwadood Rashid; His Excellency Wael Ahmed Kamal Aboul Magd, ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and his spouse, Mrs. Hanan Mohamed Abdel Kader; His Excellency Mohammed Saif Helal M. Alshehhi, ambassador of the United Arab Emirates; His Excellency Riadh Essid, ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia; Mr. Sami Haddad, chargé d'affaires, embassy of Lebanon; Mr. Said Mousa Hamad, head of the Palestinian General Delegation to Canada, and his spouse, Mrs. Claudette Hamad.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and the Middle East and North Africa region share a long history of friendship built on dynamic collaboration in key sectors such as energy, resource development, food safety, and water. This important visit, the first of its kind in Canada and certainly the first to Alberta, is a great opportunity for us to tell Alberta's story as well as to explore new areas of co-operation in a variety of sectors. Through ambassadorial visits such as this we lay the groundwork for an even stronger friendship with our partners in the Middle East and North Africa. Our esteemed guests are now standing in the Speaker's gallery, and I ask that they receive the warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 39 students from the grade 6 class of Stony Plain Central school. Some of them were here for the week of December 17 to spend a week in the Legislature and learn about the Legislature, and they're back to observe us today. I want to tell you that I spent the

last week in their classroom and these are the best and brightest that Alberta has to offer. If this is representative of our youth today, we're in good hands. Would you please rise. There are 39 students, teachers Mr. Paul McCann and Mrs. Kara Holst, and they're accompanied by parents Mrs. Shonia Tarr, Mrs. Chantal Brown, and Mr. Michael Mullen. If you'll please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three constituents from Lethbridge-West who are visiting the Legislature today. Seated in the members' gallery today are Ruth and Auke Elzinga, who are here to present the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations with a bronze sculpture called *Buffalo Spirit* by Cornelius Martens. This art piece is currently on loan and in the process of being donated to the government of Alberta, and I would like to take this time to thank Auke and Ruth for their generosity. The sculpture will be prominently displayed in the office of Aboriginal Relations, and I encourage my colleagues to take a moment to stop by and view this remarkable piece.

Also in the gallery today is Kerry Milder, outreach co-ordinator for Volunteer Lethbridge and a member of the University of Lethbridge senate. Kerry not only dedicates her time to the city of Lethbridge but also serves on numerous boards and councils throughout southern Alberta.

I'd like to thank Ruth, Auke, and Kerry for making the trip to Edmonton today. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have just met the best and the brightest from Stony Plain. Let me introduce to you the best and the brightest from Edmonton. With us today from St. Lucy school is a group of grade 6 students who are studying parliamentary democracy and everything that happens in this House and in our city hall and in our government in Ottawa. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Karen Robinson and Miss Kailee Smith and Mr. Arnold Brockmann. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly. Here they are.

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

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly somebody that I admire and somebody that I respect not only because he helped bring a Stanley Cup to Calgary in 1989 but also for the same dedication and persistence in his advocacy for victims of sexual abuse. Accompanying him today are Dr. Don Castaldi and Kim Barthel. It's Theoron Fleury that I was mentioning and getting at. I guess I was a bit awestruck as he watches me give this introduction. Dr. Don Castaldi is a clinical psychologist with a specialty in forensics and sexual deviance. He is also the adviser for the Alberta complex needs initiative. Kim Barthel is an occupational therapist with a specialty in the neurobiology of attachment and trauma. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Sallie Parmiter and her granddaughter Meagan Parmiter. Sallie is the mother of Michael Parmiter, who is a resident of Michener Centre. Sallie is a mother to seven children. She worked at Sears for 23 years. Her husband is a veteran of the armed forces. Meagan is a respite worker who is studying at Grant MacEwan to be a physiotherapist.

They are here today on behalf of Michael, who is a 44-year resident of Michener Centre who requires 24-hour care and supervision. He was born with hydrocephalitis and seizures. Sallie wants us to know that Michael has a wonderful quality of life at Michener and does not belong in a nursing home or an Alzheimer's hospital. Michael's caregivers cater to whatever makes him happy and whatever he needs, including camping trips, bike rides at the gym, dances, and bus rides. When previously moved from Michener, Michael immediately suffered from depression and was hospitalized and returned to Michener, where he recovered because that was where his home was. Please join me in giving Sallie and Meagan Parmiter the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Sandra Azocar. Sandra has been a community and labour activist in Alberta for over 30 years and is currently the executive director of Friends of Medicare. Prior to coming to Friends of Medicare Sandra worked as a vice-president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and was employed in the Ministry of Human Services. She was also a member of the board of directors of Friends of Medicare for six years before becoming its executive director. I would now ask Sandra to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for that very nice introduction. Perhaps we could salute you on your special milestone birthday today. That was a nice present to yourself.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a couple of extraordinary individuals with us today from Respect Group, Mr. Sheldon Kennedy and Mr. Wayne McNeil. Both of these men are well known for their exhaustive work serving their communities. Wayne served as trustee and vice-chair of the Rocky View school division as well as many volunteer efforts supporting children in athletics over the years. Sheldon Kennedy, of course, is known around the world not just for his skill on the ice but his efforts to give a voice to children who have been abused. In fact, just recently the Calgary Child Advocacy Centre was renamed the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in his honour to recognize the important work he continues to do on behalf of our kids.

In 2004 these two men joined forces to create the Respect Group and have made it their mission to eliminate online abuse, bullying, harassment, whether it appears in sports or at schools or in the workplace. As Minister of Education I'm particularly proud of the work these gentlemen are doing in partnership with some of

our schools around the province, creating safe, caring, and welcoming places for our students. I'd ask both Wayne and Mr. Kennedy to stand, and I'd ask you, Mr. Speaker, and the rest of the Assembly to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly seven representatives from the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, an Edmonton-based organization celebrating their 15th anniversary. Guided by the principles of the universal declaration of human rights, the John Humphrey Centre advances a culture of peace and human rights through educational programs, activities, community collaboration, and relationship building.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names: Mrs. Karen Gall, wife of founder and past president Professor Gerald Gall, who with heartfelt regret passed away in 2012; Ms Christine Rapp, QC, vice-president; Judge Gurcharan Bhatia, founder and past president; Mrs. Salma Lakhani, member of the board of directors; Ms Renée Vaugeois, executive director; Mr. Cory Cardinal, staff member, new to the organization; Ms Nehal Mahmoud, staff member, quite new to the organization as well. I would now ask that the Assembly honour my guests with the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a real pleasure for me to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of this Assembly and a good friend of Alberta. Brady Whittaker is with the Alberta Forest Products Association and is a real outstanding star that continues to promote this very important industry not only in our province but throughout Canada, United States, and Asia. Brady, if you could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six constituents and dear friends from St. Albert. I'll ask them to rise as I introduce them. Jacques Basterash has been living primarily in St. Albert since 1986. We lost him to Calgary for a couple of years, but he's back. Jacques has been an insurance broker for the past 30 years. Beth Bell has lived in St. Albert since 1976, and she came to Alberta and Canada from Britain in 1961. Beth worked as a nurse manager and retired in 2004. Ross Pronishen moved from Manitoba to St. Albert in 2006 to spend time with his sons and his grandchildren. Ross had a distinguished career with Manitoba Telephones for 40 years.

Dr. Kim Bugera has lived in St. Albert for the past 15 years, and in between raising a very active young family she finds time to serve as an optometrist in our community. Glenna Bell moved to St. Albert in October 1979 and has been a valued member of our

community every since. Glenna is an active volunteer in our community and is a trusted friend and confidante. Last but certainly not least, Sandra Fenton moved to St. Albert in 1996 with her husband, Roy, and her young family from Chilliwack, B.C. Sandra works as a very busy accountant.

All of these people are remarkable representatives of the community that we love so much. They're so active in our community and offer so much to all of us. Mr. Speaker, I am humbled to serve as their representative in the House, and I ask all members of the Assembly to welcome them with a very warm traditional sentiment.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would very much like today to introduce to you and through you a very good friend of mine, Mr. Mike Gladstone. Mr. Mike Gladstone was my campaign manager when I ran in 2008 in the riding of Calgary-Elbow for the very first time. I'm not sure that we knew exactly what we were doing, but we had a lot of fun doing it, and it turned out to be quite successful. I know he is a friend to many people on this side of the House and, I think, on the other side of the House. I'd really ask him to rise, with my heartfelt thanks, for a warm welcome from this Assembly.

Members' Statements

Administration of Health Care

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, in a few minutes question period will be under way, and once again the Official Opposition will be asking questions about health care and the current minister's many failures. We've asked dozens of questions already, questions about the combative doctors' negotiations, the ill-conceived increase in drug prices, the exorbitant expense accounts, botched facility closures, unacceptable wait-lists, undeserved executive bonuses, missed performance targets, and other areas of his responsibility. Overall, it's a pretty bleak picture.

Just yesterday the minister had to admit that allowing a former health executive to expense out-of-province treatments at the Mayo Clinic was wrong, that it was unacceptable and offensive. He boasted about how the rules had changed, how AHS was different, how the rules are the strongest in the country. Even if that's true – and we doubt it – it doesn't erase decades of waste, entitlement, and special treatment, and it doesn't get a nickel of those millions paid back.

But there's more, Mr. Speaker. In a few minutes I'll be asking the minister about a case that happened under his watch while he was minister after AHS was put in charge. In December 2011 Alison Tonge, a former VP in AHS, received services from a private diagnostic imaging clinic in Edmonton. She was invoiced \$1,160 and paid the bills. She then submitted the bills for reimbursement via expense account claim forms in January 2012. The charges were approved later that month by Dr. Chris Eagle, our current president and CEO of Alberta Health Services. This latest case goes directly to issues of universality, access, and fairness, that are the cornerstones of our public health system.

As I said yesterday in the Assembly, Alberta has a great system in many ways, with great doctors, nurses, facilities, and great support staff, but the administration and management of health care is abysmal, and the person most responsible for that is the Minister of Health.

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, another point that I wish House leaders will take under advisement is what the purpose of Members' Statements is all about. [interjections] Hang on a moment. I want to just remind you that I gave you fair warning a year ago almost when I said: please, let us elevate the level of debate and decorum in this House, and let's not take opportunities to do what I would call political assassination attempts on other members.

Now, I'm not labelling what I just heard as one of those, but it's getting pretty close to that when you attack a member in person that way. I'm just asking you to please review that. I'm not going to make any other ruling or statement on that matter today other than to just remind you of how dangerously close we sometimes come to violating some of the great sanctities of this House if we're not careful.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we have been assured time and again that the minister has fixed the problem of lavish executive expense accounts. That's all in the past, he assures us, before his time. However, in December 2011 Alison Tonge, a former VP in AHS, received services from a private diagnostic imaging clinic in Edmonton. She paid the bills, then submitted them for reimbursement in January 2012. The charges were approved later that month by Dr. Chris Eagle, our current president and CEO of Alberta Health Services. Can the Health minister explain how something like this could occur under his watch?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member's attempts to continue to undermine public confidence in our health system seem to know no bounds. I checked with Dr. Chris Eagle, the chief executive officer of Alberta Health Services, prior to question period today, and I'm informed that the expenses in question relate to the recruiting of out-of-country staff, which Ms Tonge was, and her family. The expenses incurred were for the purpose of supporting their application for landed immigrant status in Canada. Dr. Eagle has offered to provide me with a detailed explanation, which I'll be happy to table in this House.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's another example of the utter disregard AHS has for taxpayers. The culture of entitlement that we saw with other executives under the former health regions and under previous Health ministers is still alive despite this Premier's claims to have eradicated it. This executive was approved for \$1,160 in private medical expenses and then was let go with a \$426,000 severance package. Who's responsible for this?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order at 1:51. It's been noted.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, this characterization is getting a little bit ridiculous. There's no doubt that we as government fund an agency, Alberta Health Services, which, as we know, takes up a significant portion of the budget in providing public health care to

Albertans. It means that we have to engage executives that are able to provide those services, and they do a good job. There is no doubt that one of the reasons many people on this side of the House decided to run in 2008 was to change health care. That is what this minister has done with that deal with doctors on Monday, and we're very proud of him.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier, the minister, and the CEO all boasted about how the system is fixed, how expense account rules are now so strong, but here's the proof that all of those claims are just worthless bluster. This is two-tier, queue-jumping, expense account abuse all wrapped up in one offensive package. Someone needs to lose their job. Who's it going to be?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the fact that we've introduced an expense claim policy that will ensure that all information is available to the public with respect to expenses not only for Alberta Health Services but for government ministers, for MLAs, for public service, and for other agencies, boards, and commissions. There is no doubt that it's important for Albertans to understand how taxpayers' dollars are spent to ensure that we are held accountable for them, but the purpose of question period is not to come up with false allegations, mischaracterizations, and undermine public health care.

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

Health Care Accessibility

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Canada Health Act demands universality of care. Here in Alberta we don't have that. Regular folks don't get access to the Mayo Clinic to have their Alberta diagnoses confirmed. Regular folks don't get to go to a private diagnostic imaging clinic to get looked after right away. Regular folks can't submit an expense claim and get reimbursed for private treatments, but health executives can. While the Health minister insists it's been stopped, the evidence contradicts him. Doesn't the minister understand the risks of being in breach of the Canada Health Act?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from an opposition party that less than a year ago told Albertans that they believe there should be a two-tier health care system in this province. I will tell you that this side of the House fully understands the importance of the Canada Health Act and ensures that we are funding accessible, quality public health care for all Albertans. These continual mischaracterizations are absurd. It is wrong to make assumptions with respect to facts that are simply not true. It's not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order during the Premier's answer. That's been noted.

Ms Smith: Speaking of mischaracterizations, our wait time guaranteed regular Albertans would get access to care, not these health executives.

Under heavy questioning about the \$7,000 Mayo Clinic executive expense the Minister of Health repeated again and again that it happened in 2007. He wasn't the minister, so it wasn't his fault. This latest case happened in 2012. He was the minister, so this is his fault. How can this minister continue to claim that he has fixed things when he clearly hasn't?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the report of the decision in 2007 – in 2007 – I think is completely wrong. I'm actually offended by it. I think it's disgusting. It's one of the reasons that I ran in 2008, to change the culture of government and to change the culture of health care. We introduced expense guidelines that did that in September of last year, and to try to connect these two payments as being the same thing is ridiculous.

Ms Smith: If the Premier is as offended as we are, she would get the money back.

The government members like to fling accusations at us, but it's the government that has actually established a two-tier health care system, tier 1 for health executives, tier 2 for everyone else. Doesn't the minister understand that this undermines confidence in the fairness and accessibility of our public health care system?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take much in the way of sophistication to fill out an application under the freedom of information act, receive the documents, and table them with the media. What does take sophistication to do is to interpret those documents, to make appropriate inquiries as to the reasons for the expenses, and to report those accurately to the House. That is what we have done in this case.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of private health care the views of the hon. Leader of the Opposition are well known. As recently as 2005, if that isn't too far in the past to quote, she said: allowing doctors to straddle the public and private system may be one way to bridge the gap. That is one example.

Ms Smith: As I said, our wait time guarantee promised accessible care for every Albertan.

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: When a health executive gets immediate coverage for out-of-province private medical services or when another health executive gets immediate expense coverage of private medical imaging services, it's queue-jumping. This kind of coverage isn't available to others. The Vertes inquiry into preferential access heard testimony from the former Capital health CEO, but she didn't acknowledge that she signed off on the Mayo expense. Will the Premier expand and extend the Vertes inquiry to include this instance?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the inquiry with respect to the issues that Mr. Justice Vertes is dealing with fully explored all of the issues that he as an independent chair has determined to explore. There is no doubt that that will be good information for us to have going forward. We're not going to presume the outcome of that. As usual, it is still an independent inquiry. We're looking forward to the report. But this continuing characterization and parrying, suggesting innuendo and personal failures, is inappropriate. It is not acceptable, and it's not acceptable to us to see decisions that were made that were not appropriate, and that is why we changed the system.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is a huge trust problem here. When a health executive can claim medical expenses that no one else can, whether it's lavish meals, luxury cars, fancy dinners, an examination at the Mayo Clinic, or private imaging services, the public loses confidence. We need the truth. Will the Premier finally agree that Albertans deserve a full forensic audit of current and past health expenses so that we can know just how bad things really are?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has been very clear. The fact is that the rules have changed, and the rules changed under her leadership, not at the suggestion of the opposition. The hon. leader is very good at interchangeably comparing the situation in 2007 with the situation in 2012. As I've said, I've asked Dr. Eagle for an explanation as to why he authorized this expense claim. He has advised me that it relates to employment-related expenses connected with the landed immigrant status that was sought by the person claiming the amounts. He believes these amounts are in order. He will provide an explanation, and I will table it in this House.

2:00

Ms Smith: The services were billed in December 2011. She was let go in January 2012. I think you need to double-check that story, Minister.

The minister's claim that he's cleaned things up is not credible. His assurances that health expenses are no longer subject to abuse are feeble, yet they still say no to a full forensic audit. Once again, in the spirit of openness and transparency and accountability, that this government and this Premier love to trumpet all the time, I will ask: will the Health minister release all of the expenses of all of the executives of all of the health regions going back to 2005?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this question has been asked and answered and asked and answered. The hon. member opposite has made very good use of the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The hon. member knows that there is a process that governs the disclosure of documents. Many of those documents have been disclosed, they have been investigated by this government, and most importantly we have taken the necessary steps to implement new rules that I stand by and that I say can and do prevent similar situations to the 2007 claim from happening again. An additional explanation will be provided by the CEO of Alberta Health Services, but the situation is not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, glad you could join us. We learned that the former Capital health CEO approved a former COO's expense claim for medical care at the Mayo Clinic, a practice the Health minister calls despicable and which most Albertans call queue-jumping, which, interestingly, didn't come up during the inquiry. The Deputy Premier said that if what the opposition brought to light was correct, "that person and others will be dealt with." However, the Health minister essentially said: that was then; this is now; move along. To the Premier: who do you side with here, your Deputy Premier or your Health minister? Are you going to deal with it, or are you going to move along?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we side with Alberta taxpayers, and that's why we introduced new expense guidelines that ensure that this government can hold agencies, boards, and commissions accountable for all expenses. That is appropriate, that is important, and that is why a year ago, when we promised to change health care and we promised to change government, we were able to gain the confidence of Albertans and to ensure that we provided public health care to everyone in this province in a way that allowed them to continue to build family and live in their communities.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's clear this Premier sides with those few Alberta taxpayers who waste the rest of our taxpayers' money.

The Auditor General's February 2013 report clearly states that under the direction of this minister AHS hired Ernst & Young to audit only expenses claimed by the former Capital health CFO. Any Health minister worth his salt would know that the dollar value of executive claims authorized by Sheila Weatherill was absolutely outrageous. To the minister: why weren't all the health claims authorized by Mrs. Weatherill audited? What else were you afraid would come to light? Why didn't you audit everything, Minister?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are certainly not afraid of the fearmongering that persists on the part of members opposite in the discussion of this issue. The fact of the matter is that the Alberta Health Services Board took the appropriate step in requesting the Auditor General to audit the expense claims of senior Alberta Health Services executives who had served in former capacities with the former health regions. This was an important step. The Auditor General has delivered his report. We've all had the opportunity to see it. It's very interesting that the hon. members don't take the opportunity to discuss the results of that report, which were, in fact, quite positive. Moreover, the Auditor General has reviewed the expense claim procedures of Alberta Health Services today and supports those procedures.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, clearly, they're not afraid of wasting taxpayers' money.

Let's just back up here. Fact: the AHS audit arose because of the outrageous expense claims made by Allaudin Merali, which only came to light because of a FOIP by Charles Rusnell. Fact: Allaudin Merali's expense claims were authorized by Sheila Weatherill. Fact: Mrs. Weatherill approved her COO's claim for medical care at the Mayo Clinic, uncovered due to a FOIP because of the opposition. This question is for the Premier, not the Health minister. Will you finally do the right thing and authorize a forensic audit of the former Capital health region, which the current AHS CEO, Dr. Chris Eagle, originally called for?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health has said, this work has been done. We're ensuring that wherever we can pursue avenues with respect to the expense claim that the hon. member has raised, we are doing that. We are proud of the fact that we now have a system that's going to ensure that we no longer have those sorts of circumstances happen. I'm not standing here to apologize for decisions that I find personally offensive, that took place well before I and many of my colleagues were actually even elected. We got elected to change things, and we did.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Alberta Health Services Executive Expenses (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister needs to come clean with Albertans. Alberta Health Services provided preferred access to a health care service to an individual at a private, for-profit clinic, apparently as a recruitment strategy and to expedite her immigration status. Is that what the minister is saying? How is that not queue-jumping? How is that not two-tier, private health care?

Ms Redford: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let's start with the facts, which are that this is not what this minister said. What this minister simply said was that there was an employment contract in

place that did permit a person, whom we recruited in order to work and manage a very large health care system, to see whether or not they could settle in Alberta. That is all that the minister said, and any other characterization is false.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, these bills are for health care services from a doctor.

Yesterday the Health minister told the House that queue-jumping at the taxpayers' expense by Alberta Health Services executives was a thing of the past. He said, "This situation could not happen and is not happening in Alberta today." Today we've learned that it's not a thing of the past. It's still happening on this Health minister's watch. To the Premier: how can Albertans have confidence in a Health minister that denies that queue-jumping at taxpayers' expense is happening when it is?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I don't actually understand how Albertans would have confidence if they actually listened to the false structures of these questions, that draw unequal parallels, that characterize completely different fact situations as being the same thing. It is not appropriate. The information with respect to the question asked today will be provided. This minister has never misled the House.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier's lawyer double-talk is not going to work this time.

This PC government can't be trusted to protect our health care system. In public the government assures us that they support universal public health care, but behind the scenes senior health executives get preferential treatment from private, for-profit health care corporations. It looks a lot like private two-tier, American-style health care to me, Mr. Speaker. How can Albertans have confidence in a government that permits preferential access to health services paid for by taxpayers for its senior officials?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the reason that Albertans can have confidence in how this government provides public health care is because we're committed to it. I don't know where I was on Monday compared to everyone else. I was standing in Calgary with the president of the AMA signing a seven-year employment contract with doctors in this province to provide certainty in the health care system, and this Minister of Health negotiated that deal. [interjections]

The Speaker: Why don't we all take a moment and thump on our desks and all feel better about that. Go ahead. [applause] I feel better after that, too. Thank you.

Let's move on.

2:10 Out-of-province Health Services

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of confusion, so I'm just going to make it a little simpler here. A senior in my riding was recently told that she needed immediate shoulder surgery. If not done, it would cause irreparable damage to her shoulder, active. Booking for surgery was a ridiculous three-year wait. Instead, she took her health care into her own hands, and she booked her surgery in B.C. The cost of that surgery: \$17,000 out of her own pocket. The AHS cost – she went to the committee – a \$980 reimbursement. Minister, please help me understand, so I can explain to my constituents, how you can justify paying for Alberta Health executives who clearly jump the queue, yet Albertans have to do so many . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, no one has proven that any Alberta Health Services executive since this government took office has jumped the queue, and to suggest so on the basis of a receipt tabled in the House is simply not accurate. What the hon. member should know is that the Out-of-country Health Services Committee program is administered by a separate committee independent of government. If the hon. member wants to make a direct connection between her question and her constituent's problem, I'd be pleased to look into it. If she wants to falsely connect it to other allegations that have been made in the House earlier today, I can't help her.

Mrs. Towle: Well, luckily for us, Albertans have the ability to read.

Given that we have already heard of two families in serious need of life-saving health care that was not offered in Alberta – and they were denied – and given that this Alberta Health Services executive billed taxpayers for this private diagnostic service in December of 2011, left AHS in January of 2012, and received over \$400,000 in severance, doesn't the minister understand that Albertans will not see this as fair?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is the typical non sequitur that we hear in the questions that have been offered by this member earlier this week. We've dealt with the issue that was raised at the beginning of question period with respect to the expense claim in question. If the hon. member wants to help her constituent, one thing she could do is to inform her constituent of the process that is available to recoup health expenses that are provided out of province or out of country. This program is administered independently of government, and the insured services that are provided in B.C. would not be provided in Alberta because this government stands up for public health care.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order at 2:11 p.m., during the minister's first answer. We'll note that later.

The hon. member. Final question.

Mrs. Towle: We helped her with that process, and you kindly gave her back \$980.

Given that this minister continues to insist that there is a fair process for approving these out-of-province claims and given that Alberta Health Services executives don't have to go before the same committees that Albertans do, will this government not agree that the process is not working and create a policy that allows all Albertans to obtain health coverage even when treatment is not offered in Alberta or exceeds the excessive wait times that are currently the case?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as was indicated in answers in the estimates last evening for the Department of Health, we know that over 12,000 Albertans received financial support for out-of-province and out-of-country health services last year. We regularly provide this level of support. It is based on physician adjudication of patient need and circumstance, not the adjudication of ministers or elected members of the House. There is an appeal process that's available for people that are unhappy with the decision they receive from the committee, and we'll continue to provide funding to support this program to get Albertans access to the services they need.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Collective Bargaining Agreements

Mr. Young: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been very clear about the need for making tough, thoughtful decisions necessary to ensure that this government lives within its means. As we know, compensation to our hard-working teachers and doctors and other public sectors make up a significant portion of the provincial budget. With the number of people moving to Alberta and even with the zero per cent increases, my question to the Premier: how are we able to control the costs for the sustainability of these services?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last three months we've had tremendous success, and I want to give credit to our Minister of Health and the Minister of Education for signing landmark deals with doctors and teachers that ensure that we're able to continue to provide public services to students in classrooms and public health care through doctors to patients. We have agreements that are in place now that provide long-term labour peace, that are going to allow us to continue to adapt and to deliver services and to ensure that we do that in a way that allows us to not increase taxes and to not increase our spending.

Mr. Young: Again to the Premier. Parents are counting on teachers to be able to focus on the classroom. Albertans are counting on physicians to be able to focus on their patients' needs. How will these tentative agreements, that have taken so long to negotiate, provide stability with the current budget challenges?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we know, working with both the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta Medical Association, that since they have memberships, these agreements do need to be ratified by their membership. We're seeing tremendous progress with respect to the agreement around education with the ATA, with over half of the boards and locals ratifying this. Speaking to the president of the AMA on Monday, he was very confident that we will see ratification of the deal, which is the longest deal for doctors in Canada, something that we really need to be proud of, and we have to commend the Minister of Health for negotiating it.

Mr. Young: Mr. Speaker, how will these agreements allow us to focus and address system challenges and operational budget pressures going forward?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what's really important in both of these agreements is that we have ministers that are able to work with employee associations and unions to put in place not only financial terms but also terms with respect to governance. There's no way that we could run an education system or a health care system without consulting with the professionals that are delivering services within that system. So the governance that we've been able to see, which involves participation from both teachers and doctors, is going to allow us to not only continue to provide the excellent care that we have but to improve it even further.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, AMVIC, the Motor Vehicle Industry Council, is the province's regulator for the auto industry. AMVIC enforces legislation, investigates complaints, and protects Albertans against unfair business practices. A recent investigation, however, suggested that AMVIC is dropping the ball and that Albertans are getting gouged by some dealerships for hundreds of

dollars in bogus fees. To the minister: how widespread is the practice of Albertans getting gouged, and how have you allowed this to happen under your watch?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I'm referring to the same thing that the hon. member did, and if I am, the cases where people were being charged for services not received were actually as a result of an investigation done through AMVIC and this government. So while this is being characterized as the system not working, it's actually an example of the system working very well. I think they're some people that have worked very hard and continue to investigate and make sure that Albertans get fair value when they do business in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Automobile Protection Association, an industry watchdog, has shockingly stated that it believes AMVIC is actually colluding with dealerships to have these fees forced on hard-working Albertans, has the minister investigated these extremely disturbing allegations?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about somebody who has made a statement, and he's talking about, I think, illegal activity. I think the correct place to take a question about illegal activity would be to the police. If that's the case, I'm sure they'll investigate, and I'm sure they'll get to the bottom of it.

I can tell you that AMVIC and this government work very hard to make sure that when Albertans do business, they're treated fairly in an environment where they can trust the rules that make sure that they get fair value when they do business in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second and final supplementary.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the news today that AMVIC has just fired several of its senior investigators after these revelations surfaced and given that three weeks ago the minister stated, and I quote, that this is a very serious issue that demands the attention of government, will the minister finally do his job, uphold the integrity of the regulator, and protect Albertans from predatory practices?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member ought to know, the AMVIC is an arm's-length organization. The hon. member also ought to know that it's somewhat inappropriate to comment on internal, personal matters. I'll tell you what. The Minister of Service Alberta is involved in some internal restructuring. I don't know whether it's really related to what the member is asking because he hasn't been extra clear. But I can tell you that if he has somebody concerned about an activity that he doesn't think is legal, the police is the right place to ask the question, and I'm sure that they will investigate that fully.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Bicycle Safety on Roadways and Trails

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Currie is a constituency with many urban professionals who place a value on environmental stewardship. I recently met with a bike shop owner

in my constituency. He's a strong advocate for cycling strategies that ensure cyclist safety and encourage Albertans to choose cycling as an alternate method of transportation. Of course, this is a choice that, if encouraged in Alberta through proper infrastructure and trail systems, will impact our environment and health care systems in a very positive way. All of my questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Can you explain how the development of policies, guidelines, and standards for trails in Alberta's highway rights-of-way will provide direction to our avid cyclists, who are seeking safe ways . . .

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. Now, we have started looking at guidelines and standards for pathways and areas where cyclists can travel around Alberta, and I can tell you that it's just one tool that we're going use to make sure that not only on pathways but off we can get vulnerable users around, and that, of course, includes cyclists. One example that we're doing is working in partnership with the county of Rocky View on the highway 8 corridor to provide a place for a laneway that cyclists will be able to use to safely travel that route.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will your ministry ensure that we promote safe, easy travel through the use of way-finding signs, particularly in rural areas, where every extra day a tourist stays means extra dollars put into dining, accommodations, and entertainment, some of the main ingredients of economic impact in the tourism industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The question is a good one because it's something we're actually working on, and frankly the member is right in pointing out that we're looking to actually improve what we currently do. Since 2004 we've been working in co-operation with Alberta Tourism and other departments in replacing some of the old brown tourist signs with the blue-and-white ones and actually even trying to work with the industry to find other ways to direct people off the roads and byways and into the towns, villages, and other tourist places of Alberta. If we're getting criticism that we need to do better, we are trying to do better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lastly, a very big question that has been asked and comes up quite often is: will this minister consider introducing a three-foot passing law as was introduced in the Ontario Legislature?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I'll give the short answer, which is no, and then I'll give the longer answer, which isn't no. Rather, the fact is that the three-foot law, or the one-metre law, as was suggested here, was introduced, as I understand it, in the Legislature in Ontario, but it wasn't passed. I understand there are a number of states in the U.S., but not that many, that have a law like this. In Alberta we have laws that protect cyclists on the road, but at this time we're not actually considering adding this particular regulation.

Funding for Private Schools

Mr. Hehr: The consequence of eliminating references to the Charter and the Human Rights Act in our Education Act is that many schools now believe these acts don't matter. It is the Edmonton Islamic Academy's policy that children with disabilities will not be accepted. A video shows a man lecturing students, apparently during class time. "Someone who is homosexual is like someone who has diabetes or someone who has cancer or AIDS." To the Minister of Ed.: as taxpayers send \$4.5 million to this private school, shouldn't children with disabilities be allowed to attend and teachings be free from discrimination?

Mr. J. Johnson: Yes. The answer is yes. Mr. Speaker, our goal and our expectation is that all of our schools would be promoting diversity and teaching respect. Albertans told us that they wanted an education system for all Albertans that values that diversity and respect and that has welcome, caring, respectful, and safe schools. We're not going to tolerate any attempt to promote hatred or intolerance or discrimination of any kind in our schools.

Mr. Hehr: Can the minister tell me if he is investigating what is happening in our private schools and whether ongoing violations of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our Alberta Human Rights Act are continuing?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty broad allegation. You know, in Alberta parents and students have the choice to go to faith-based schools, to go to private schools, but even if they do go to those, those schools need to follow the programs and studies outlined in Alberta Education and within the Education Act and within the Human Rights Act and teach the Alberta programs of study. I have asked my department to check into this school and visit this school and make sure that this situation that arose that is concerning to some of us is not going to continue and that we won't have this in any of our schools in the province.

Mr. Hehr: Given that these violations of our Human Rights Act in our school system appear to be a regular theme here in Alberta, can the minister not see why this is a textbook example of why we should not be funding private schools and separating children on the basis of wealth and religion?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let's not smear all private schools because of one incident. These schools are providing kids and parents with some very important choices and some very important diversity in our system. What this party is saying is that they respect diversity; just let's not fund it.

I want to encourage the member, like I did before, to actually visit some of the private schools. What he's talking about, if he's talking about removing funding from these schools, is eliminating schools like Inner City high in Alberta, that serves at-risk students, or the Elves Special Needs Society, that provides schooling for kids with severe disabilities, or the Janus Academy in Calgary, that serves autistic students. This is the face of private schools in our province.

Municipal Charters

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, using a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work when it comes to Alberta municipalities. Our communities range from summer villages of 50 people to urban centres of over a million. It's time that we recognized the diversity and uniqueness of our communities in policy and in legislation. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: do

you think that a summer village has the same needs and provides the same services as our large cities?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, that's kind of an absurd question. Villages, summer villages, hamlets, counties, the cities, medium-sized cities, small towns all provide different services for the different needs of the people in those communities. It's a fact.

The Speaker: Hon. member, be careful not to be asking questions that call for opinion. Proceed with your second question.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that on June 12, 2012, this minister signed a memorandum of understanding that recognizes the unique character of Alberta's two largest cities and given that a solution for the big-city charter was to be completed by this February and given that legislation was supposed to be tabled for a big-city charter this spring, will the minister admit to the mayors, Calgarians, and Edmontonians that his idea for our big cities is just another big broken promise?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard to review the MGA and rewrite it so that municipalities are empowered with all sorts of abilities to meet their local constituents' needs. If the member would read the press release again, factually it actually says that if legislation is needed, it could be tabled this spring. We have worked and will continue to work to come to a solution for this fall. There's no broken promise, and if the member would actually check what spring means, we're in the middle of it. It's not even over yet.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tick-tock, tick-tock.

Given that this minister is already an expert on the 13 ways to kill your community and given this minister's apparent efforts to stifle any progress made on the much-needed big-city charter, I have a suggestion for the minister if he ever wants to turn his latest failed project into another book: *One Big Way To Kill Your Cities*.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have just pointed out that technically spring hasn't even begun yet.

We worked with our municipalities on the rewrite of the MGA, on the municipal sustainability initiative, on the municipal sustainability strategy. The civic charter: we're going to continue to work on that, Mr. Speaker. The insinuation at all that this is a failed attempt when we still have months to go and lots of work to do is ludicrous.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Research Development and Commercialization

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education has had a rough time lately. His proposed changes to Alberta's postsecondary system under his Campus Alberta brand have been widely panned. More than just poor policy planning, forced mandate letters since adjusted to be more collaborative, and sudden budget cuts, the minister has shown a reluctance to even talk with faculty and students. Recently the minister announced a new partnership with a company to improve research and commercialization. It sounds good, but we haven't heard much about it since. To the minister. I'm giving you a chance to be transparent now. What are the terms of the MOU?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I'm shocked. I don't have it here, but I have an e-mail and a note from the member telling me just about two days ago how well I'm doing and what a good idea it is to introduce Campus Alberta and how this is the right thing to do for advanced education. So if something happened over the last 24 hours, Member, send me another note, but you told me something the very opposite in private.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that all presidents of Campus Alberta have met with me. They embraced the concept. As we speak, they are all meeting in Banff for the U of A and mapping out their role in Campus Alberta. I'm not sure what his concerns are as of the last 24 hours.

2:30

Mr. Bikman: Mr. Speaker, a simple question. You made a deal with Siemens, an MOU signed. What are the terms of the agreement?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, maybe I should meet with the member again because the Siemens deal has nothing to do with Campus Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Siemens is one of the world's largest knowledge-based companies from Germany, that has made a marvellous decision to invest in Alberta. They're relocating their energy research centre from down east to Calgary. This is a company that files 25 patents per day, and their focus is very much aligned with Alberta's; that is, energy, environment, health care, research development, and commercialization of research, which is exactly what we need to do in our province.

Mr. Bikman: Mr. Speaker, to this minister again: given that Siemens could become a key player in Alberta's economy, when can Albertans, the people who pay the bills, expect to know the cost as well as the benefits of this relationship?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not paying anything. Zero. Zilch. This is an MOU that attracts the company to Alberta and allows them to be in touch with our private-sector industry, allows them to be in touch with all institutions within Campus Alberta, our learning institutions, to see if there can be any collaborative research done between Alberta companies and Alberta schools to better our economy, to better our quality of life, to develop products that could be commercialized not only locally but internationally. The benefit to Albertans is magnificent. The cost, zero.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Renewable Energy Strategy

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the doors in Calgary-Varsity, especially when I'm on campus at the University of Calgary, constituents ask why the province of Alberta doesn't yet have a renewable energy strategy. It's a good question. To the Minister of Energy: what is your plan for a made-in-Alberta renewable energy strategy, and when do you plan to put this in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, this government clearly recognizes the importance of our greenhouse gas footprint. We're recognizing the importance of

that for access for our products to be shipped around the world. One important aspect of that obviously is renewable energy. If you look at this great success, actually, in this province to date, 7.5 per cent of the capacity in the electricity system today comes from wind. There are some 20 different new projects that are either under consideration or in various processes as well.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: To the same minister: how do you stimulate the use of renewables here in Alberta in ways that don't distort the marketplace?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the great advantages we have here in Alberta is that we have a very competitive and open and welcoming investment climate for parties to come and play. We've got one of the highest penetrations of wind supply in the country. That's come about in an environment where there hasn't been any distortion of the market using other economic factors other than a great place to invest, lots of wind, good interconnection capacity to a very robust network and backbone.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Finally, Minister, given that we have a lot of natural gas in this province, how can you support a renewable energy strategy here in Alberta while at the same time endorsing enhanced natural gas utilization here in Alberta?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, we recognize the importance of renewable energy in this province as being an important aspect of the future of the province, but let's be realistic. We as Alberta, as Canada, as North America, and as the world are not going to be off fossil fuels any time soon. There's going to continue to be huge demand for fossil fuels. To the extent possible natural gas is a fabulous fossil fuel that can be used with a lower greenhouse gas footprint. We're encouraging and looking at all options to ensure that we are able to continue to make the best use of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Compensation for Pharmacy Services

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to cause harm to the delivery of health care with its negligent, Fredicare approach to pharmacies and drug pricing. A pharmacist from my constituency estimates that Toradol, a pain medication, will cost consumers 300 per cent more than what is currently paid. Furthermore, the very basic drug penicillin has been delisted and will no longer be covered by insurance. Would this Health minister like me to arrange a meeting with him and health care professionals on the importance of penicillin, pain medication, and pharmacists?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we are in touch with pharmacists across the province, and we were very pleased about a week ago to announce \$40 million in additional support for pharmacists during the transition to the lower price on generic drugs. The hon. member is incorrect. Penicillin is available in Alberta, and as with all of our drugs we have multiple manufacturers that are able to provide a drug with the same active ingredient. Therefore, we have the ability to deliver on our commitment to get the lowest possible price for drugs for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many pharmacists that have talked to me have stockpiles of drugs affected by the imposed 30-day washout period and given that this is not enough time to move the products, when will this government listen to pharmacists, stop meddling in the drug market, and extend the washout period in order for pharmacists to recover those costs?

The Speaker: Hon. members, just be reminded that you've got another three hours on Health estimates today.

Hon. minister, if it's a policy-related type of answer that you wish to give, proceed.

Mr. Horne: Well, the policy of this government is to deliver the lowest possible drug prices for Albertans, and that includes generic drugs. The hon. member is correct that we have provided a 30-day washout period, as it's termed, to allow pharmacies that have purchased drugs at the higher price to sell those drugs at the higher price. We consulted with the Alberta Pharmacists Association on this decision, and all of us in the government caucus consulted with pharmacists in our own constituencies. That with the other measures we've introduced, Mr. Speaker, is providing extra support to pharmacists during the price reduction.

Mr. Hale: Not according to my pharmacists.

Given that pharmacists in my constituency are saying that this Fredicare will force them to close their doors, leaving patients without access to an essential part of health care, when will the minister explain to Albertans and pharmacists why this government is trying to drive them out of business?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The hon. member, if he hasn't already done so, should discuss with his pharmacists the opportunities under our professional pharmacy services framework for pharmacists to be treated as full members of the health care team. That, of course, includes the opportunity to bill for professional services like renewing a prescription, like preparing a care plan for a complex patient, and like working with other health professions as part of a team delivering care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bridge Safety

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the years Alberta Transportation has provided our counties and municipal districts with grants to assist with the construction and maintenance of roadways and bridges. Recently, however, funding for the local road/bridge program has been reduced. This program assisted municipalities in addressing their bridge construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance needs. My question to the Minister of Transportation: given the cuts to this program how does your department plan on keeping Alberta bridges safe and up to code?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question, and I want the hon. member to know that although we're responsible for a sizable network of roads and bridges, we take safety very seriously. I can assure the member that regardless of the changes and the adjustments to the budget on this program, every inspection that was done last year will be done this year. Safety is a big priority, and bridges are a big part of that. It's a big

responsibility, and there's no finish line, so I can assure the hon. member that we will stay on the file.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: given that even before these reductions the Auditor General found deficiencies in terms of the quality, timeliness, and completeness of bridge inspections, how are you planning on addressing this issue with even less money available?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very good opportunity, as it turns out, to talk about the audit we got last year, where the Auditor made some recommendations to us, and the fact that we've accepted every one of those recommendations. They're all essentially fulfilled. We've met our responsibilities. We thank the Auditor for the advice. Let me point out to the House and to any Albertans watching that the audit also said very clearly: we saw no evidence of unsafe bridges. Albertans can have great confidence.

2:40

Mr. Quest: Well, it's good to hear, Mr. Speaker.

My second supplemental to the same minister: given that our bridges continue to age around the province and in my constituency, Minister, can you provide a summary of updated bridge inspections and the quality in the riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park so we can be assured that our travels are safe?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all continue to age, as does our infrastructure.

If the hon. member has an issue with a particular bridge or a particular structure, I would be more than happy, you know, to give him that specific information online. As has been said in the House before, there are somewhere north of 4,000 bridges. Again, for this member or anyone in the House: if they have a question about a specific one, I'd be happy to try to answer that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to proceed with Members' Statements in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Financial Oversight of Alberta Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today more evidence has emerged that this PC government can't be trusted to protect Alberta's public health care system, yet another executive submitting expense claims through Alberta Health Services after accessing private health care, this time under the current Minister of Health's watch, in 2012. For our public health officials to show this kind of contempt for the health care we have in Alberta is more than disappointing. It is outrageous.

Under this Health minister's very eyes Alberta Health Services violated the Canada Health Act, section 12(1)(a), which reads that a province "must provide for insured health services on uniform terms and conditions." But instead of observing the law that protects public health care in Canada, the very people who are supposed to be improving the care of ordinary people are undermining it. Perhaps these executives aren't even fully motivated to improve the system because they'll simply expense claim their way to the front of the line.

Alberta's NDP has always been committed to improving, strengthening, and extending public health care, but this PC government continually attempts to starve, undermine, and weaken public health care in Alberta. It's time for this PC government to take responsibility for their legacy in our health care system. It's time that they step up to ensure proper financial oversight of AHS and ensure that the people in charge of our public health care system actually believe in public health care. This government, this Premier, this Health minister, and indeed the executives that run Alberta Health Services must, as Alberta's NDP always has, stand up for public health care and stand up against two-tier health care and queue-jumping.

This government and this Health minister have lost control of Alberta's health care system. They appoint boards full of high-flying, wealthy businesspeople to control it and then try to avoid responsibility when their rich friends make decisions that hurt health care for everyday Albertans.

Alberta's NDP is committed to strengthening our public health system and to ensuring that all Albertans have access to high-quality health care. We will continue to stand up to this PC government's attempts to damage public health care so all Albertans receive access to the care they need regardless of income.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Calgary-Currie.

John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured and privileged to rise in recognition of the 15th anniversary of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, a charitable, nonprofit Edmonton organization which was established on November 26, 1998.

November 1998 was a pivotal time for this signature organization as their *raison d'être* drew inspiration and action from the International Conference on Universal Rights and Human Values: A Blueprint for Peace, Justice and Freedom, held in Edmonton that month, and also for individuals with a shared interest in contributing to a new view of the world, which has a common high standard and value for peace, human rights, and freedoms. The conference was the largest international commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights.

Conference delegates, Mr. Speaker, included the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus and Nobel laureate; and Her Excellency Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, the centre is named after the late John P. Humphrey, a Canadian lawyer and the principal drafter of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, which celebrates 65 years on December 10 of this year. Central to the goals of the John Humphrey Centre is to observe and realize the universal implementation of human rights through the teaching and education of all people, with a focus on children and youth.

Also, through the lens of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights they seek universal recognition, understanding, promotion, and protection of human rights, which are essential to maintain and advance the everlasting culture of peace and human rights.

Since 1998 with pride and conviction the John Humphrey Centre has made undeniable progress. Congratulations to the enormous leadership of all those involved, who have contributed to the long-standing success of the John Humphrey Centre.

Heartfelt thanks for adding immeasurably to our city, province, and country, and best wishes for continued success in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-South East.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to celebrate outstanding educators in Alberta. This week 129 excellence in teaching award semifinalists from across the province are being recognized in Calgary and Edmonton. On May 25 twenty of these outstanding teachers will be added to the distinguished list of over 500 former excellence in teaching award recipients since 1989.

Last year I brought greetings on behalf of our Minister of Education at the award recipients' ceremony. I can tell you that these are the educators who recognize that teaching is not a job; teaching is a vocation.

Shaping Alberta's next generation is a huge responsibility. These semifinalists embody the vision and the direction of Alberta's Inspiring Education initiative, which is to lead students towards being engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit.

These are the teachers and administrators who understand the minds of the children that we serve today and the whole new world that they will live in tomorrow, a creative, innovative, and interactive world that we as a government strive every day to imagine and to build.

I want to publicly congratulate each and every one of these incredible teachers for making a difference in the lives of our kids. I think I can speak on behalf of all Albertans to say that just as every challenge is embraced by all of us, every student's success and victory is felt by all of us as well.

Thank you to these individuals, who have not just measured up to the expectations but have gone beyond in the most important place that we can have success, our schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Alberta Advantages

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Disgust, ridiculous, unethical, corrupt, immoral, wrong: these are words we've heard in the past. These are words that come from a place of anger. They breed hate and misinformation. They pit people against each other. They don't lift people up, and they certainly don't describe hope.

Mr. Speaker, these are the words that oppressors and haters used to describe Dr. Martin Luther King and his plight to emancipate African-Americans and the poor. Dr. King had a dream that in America and, in fact, the world the best was yet to come, which he articulated in his mountaintop speech on April 3, 1968.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. I've been to the Lorraine Motel, which is now the National Civil Rights Museum. It's an experience I'll never forget. It's an experience that affirmed in me that whatever I do in life, I will do my best to lift people up.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that has made the same commitment to Albertans, to work hand in hand

with them and represent them to the world. Like Dr. King, I believe the best is yet to come in this province and that we must build on our strengths rather than rip everything down that the people of this province created with their hard work and their great ideas for Alberta.

Let me reiterate a sampling of Alberta's many accomplishments. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has by far the strongest protection for land and property rights in Canada. Alberta leads the nation in growth. Alberta has a first-rate education system that consistently ranks near the top in the world. Our institutions of higher learning are world class. In fact, with only 11 per cent of the national population Alberta holds 17 per cent of the Canada excellence research chairs. Alberta has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, the lowest taxes. At the end of the day Alberta is the best place in the world to live. It is the best place to grow up, to study, to work, to raise a family, and to retire.

To say that Alberta has much to be proud of would be an understatement, Mr. Speaker. I see no reason to be anything but positive in my outlook for this province. I'm proud to call myself an Albertan. I'm even more proud to say that I have the privilege of serving this great province under this leader.

2:50

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Mr. Anderson: Well, on that happy note, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are getting more and more upset with this government's irresponsible handling of our province's budget crisis. Although most understand the need to cut wasteful spending in order to balance the budget, Albertans don't understand why the government is cutting directly on the front lines rather than axing corporate grants or trimming our largest in the nation bureaucracy.

They don't understand how we can on the one hand spend \$350 million on new MLA offices, \$2 billion on direct industry grants to pump CO₂ underground, and hundreds of millions on waste and mismanagement in our health care system, and then, on the other hand, cut front-line services for the vulnerable.

For example, the Bethany care centres in Airdrie, Cochrane, and Calgary provide long-term care for 800 seniors, many of them with very severe dementia. The government has recently cut funding for these seniors, resulting in the firing of 53 full-time front-line workers, resulting in pain and discomfort for these wonderful seniors. Bethany has detailed how these changes have increased the time spent by seniors waiting for help to go to the bathroom, reduced the amount of offered activities, rushed meal times, and increased agitation where staff are often unavailable to assist dementia patients who've become confused or disoriented.

I hope that each of you on that side of the House, while you're patting yourselves on the backs, thinks about this when you are looking out the window of your \$350 million new MLA Taj Mahal next year or perhaps when your RSP allowance comes in several thousands of dollars higher than it was when you were first elected.

When governments make wasteful, selfish, and irresponsible spending decisions, there are real-life consequences for real people. Your poor decisions and unwillingness to cut the real fat in your bloated government is causing our seniors, who built what we enjoy today, to suffer needlessly. These cuts to seniors' care at Bethany and other front-line service cuts should be reversed immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present under Standing Order 98(2) the following petitions that have been received for private bills:

- (1) the petition of Stephen D. Miller, trustee of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act.
- (2) the petition of Charles Frederick Barth, chair of the members of Misericordia hospital for the Misericordia Hospital Amendment Act, 2013, and
- (3) the petition of Lynn Jacobson, president of the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, for the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers Amendment Act, 2013.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to present the third installment of the pheasant release sustainability program petition, that was reviewed and improved in format by Parliamentary Counsel. These petitions are coming in from around the province. With the third installment of this petition we have 1,449 signatures from Albertans who are petitioning the Leg. 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.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of five copies of the document I mentioned today, the travel, hospitality, and hosting expense claim form, signed by Dr. Chris Eagle, for expenses at the private diagnostic centre, on behalf of the VP from AHS, Alison Tonge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First of all, I have the appropriate number of copies of documents referred to by the leader of the NDP caucus in question period today. In particular, these are promotional materials for the privately funded diagnostic clinic which an AHS official attended on the dime of Alberta taxpayers, apparently as part of a recruitment package consisting of taxpayer-funded private health care for someone recruited to manage our public system.

The second set of documents is again the appropriate number of copies of e-mail submissions that Albertans have sent to the Premier and copied to me. These are just some of the many hundreds of e-mails that my office has received calling on the Premier to honour her government's promise to Albertans not to evict some of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens from their home in Red Deer's Michener Centre. Submissions like this clearly show that keeping the Michener Centre open is a priority of Albertans and that this PC government is out of touch with its broken-promises budget.

The final group, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of e-mail submissions that Albertans made to our prebudget tour, which visited seven cities in February. Gerald, M. Januario, and Kyla are some of the Albertans who have provided valuable input. For example, high school teacher Kyla's primary concern is a lack of proper funding for education in Alberta. Submissions like this clearly show what the priorities of Albertans are and how out of touch the government's broken-promises budget is with those priorities.

Thank you.

Mr. Hehr: I have two tablings today, Mr. Speaker. The first is an article by Ezra Levant, which goes through the goings-on at the Edmonton Islamic Academy and shows where clerics visit to give lectures in sharia law.

The other one that I referenced in my question was the criteria for admission at the Edmonton Islamic Academy, which states clearly that no student with special needs or IPPs need apply.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the MOU, or memorandum of understanding, between the government of Alberta and the cities of Calgary and Edmonton for the establishment of a big-city charter. The agreement states that the charter will be in place by spring of 2013. Considering the progress that's been made to date, cities are growing impatient and increasingly worried that this agreement will amount to little more than another broken promise.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table five copies of a handout on my ministry's performance measures. Last winter we developed new performance measures to more transparently reflect the department's effectiveness at delivering on its mandate. This chart, which was presented to the standing committee in budget estimates this morning, April 17, shows the relationship between my ministry's activities, the performance measures, and the results Albertans can expect to see.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter from David Ross, who contacted me as a concerned father of a young man who is under the care of PDD in Alberta and found out at an informational meeting in Calgary that budget cuts to PDD were going to significantly harm a day program for his son. Fifty per cent of that budget will be taken out. The son has a worker who takes him four days a week into the community and supervises him as he does volunteer work for the food bank and the Bethany care centre, unbelievably, as well. Because of this funding being cut, his son will no longer be able to do that. Those types of programs will essentially have to be at home. He's very concerned about that, and I would ask the Minister of Human Services to take a look as well.

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. Griffiths, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by Ms Smith, hon. Member for Highwood; Mr. Bilous, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre; and Mr. Rowe, hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on March 6, 2013, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs 2012-13 supplementary supply estimates debate.

The Speaker: I believe that concludes the Routine, and we can move on to points or order. The first point of order, I believe, was Airdrie.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, please proceed with your citation and your point.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, if you would like, I called three points of order, but two of them could be merged into one if that would speed things up.

3:00

The Speaker: Okay. Is it 1 and 2 or 1 and 3 or 2 and 3?

Mr. Anderson: It's 1 and 2.

The Speaker: Okay. Proceed. Thank you.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Anderson: This is referring to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically making allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives, and also – well, we'll stick with those ones. They refer to two comments: the Health minister, who said specifically that this side of the House did not support public health care; and then, of course, the Premier's comment that we campaigned on a two-tier health care plan.

Mr. Speaker, it's one thing to have different opinions about certain things, and that certainly happens in this Legislature a lot. However, it's quite another to completely misrepresent the facts. On our website, our caucus website, our party website, in the campaign our members and our caucus have been very clear that we completely support the tenets of the Canada Health Act and do not support a two-tier health care system. Now, we do support, of course, a health wait time guarantee, where if the wait is too long in the public system – over six months, I believe it is, for some serious treatments – we would pay to have that service done out of province if necessary. That would be available to all Albertans. It wouldn't be two-tier. It would be if they were waiting on a wait list longer than six months.

That is something that needs to be cleared up. When we start throwing things around like that that say that we want to break the Canada Health Act, that we're actively doing that, that's just fundamentally not true. I hope that that would clarify those untruthful comments.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for keeping his comments brief. I will endeavour to do the same.

I do not have the benefit of the Blues that you may have, Mr. Speaker, but I believe the exact comment from the hon. Minister

of Health was the undermining of health care, and this is a matter of his particular opinion.

The second thing that I would indicate is that this member has somewhat of a revisionist view of history. I go back to the election, and this is a document that I'll table tomorrow. A quote from the *Globe and Mail* from April 5, 2012: "Wildrose promises private health care on public dime to shorten waiting times." Now, again . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I can hardly hear myself think over this member's heckling. It is not our fault on the government side that this member doesn't like what his party has said in the past.

There is no point of order here because what the Minister of Health was simply stating is true. This member is also trained in the law, Mr. Speaker, and he knows that truth is an absolute defence. With respect, there is no point of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie has already said that it's more a point of clarification. I would agree with him. But it is a reminder again of previous discussions we've had here, particularly over the last few days. We just need to be a little bit careful and perhaps at times even sensitive as to what we say, how we say it, the tone and manner in which we deliver our statements, and so on. That would save the House enormous amounts of time.

I'm going to save the House some time right now by accepting that this is a point of clarification and it not be debated any further.

Let us move on to the third point. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This refers also to 23(h), (i), and (j), but also (l): "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." The Minister of Health specifically stated that nothing has been proven with regard to queue-jumping by health executives and so forth. That's what he was alluding to, nothing has been proven in this House since the government took office.

Now, of course, I would ask for a clarification from that side because clearly that's not true. The PC government has been in power for 42 years. It's very clear that the evidence tabled yesterday in this House very clearly showed that a health executive did jump the queue and went to the Mayo Clinic, and that's all been hashed out in this Assembly. In fact, the Premier and the Health minister both said and agreed, conceded, that that did happen and said that it was unacceptable. As well, of course, we have the documents that were alluded to today and will be tabled going forward, those FOIP requests, et cetera.

So for the Health minister to stand and say that nothing has been proven, saying that we are just falsely throwing out allegations, is just not true. You can't say something that is just patently not true in this House. We've shown the evidence. It's been accepted by the other side, specifically on the Mayo Clinic issue from yesterday. I'm sure they'll change their position tomorrow, but who knows? I'm not going to speculate on what we brought forward today. There's no doubt that it has been proven that queue-jumping has indeed been occurring.

Again, you know, I don't see the point of bringing any kind of accusation of intentionally misleading the House. Obviously, things are said in debate. But to say that something is not proven, that they just yesterday said did happen and conceded, is nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, and I'll again endeavour to be brief, Mr. Speaker. The member has suggested that. Nothing has been proven. Well, he's made all sorts of allegations and innuendo here, but allegations and innuendo are just that. I realize that there's no point of order on a point of order, but even 23(h) talks about making allegations against another member. We hear all these allegations. We've recently had an independent inquiry as to queue-jumping. There was nothing found of substance. Again, the member, with respect, keeps moving forward and talking about things that are not true.

I would suggest again, with respect and deference to you, that there is no point of order here.

The Speaker: You know, hon. members, we don't move ahead in the Assembly too much when we stand up to defend a point of order by then giving rise to something that might cause another point to be raised. I think we understand the intent of what you're trying to say here, and the clarification as given is accepted.

I want to say two things here very quickly and clearly. Number one, in reviewing the Blues, which I've just received, it's clear here what the Minister of Health had said and that his reference was to the current government, and I think everyone understands what is meant by that. What is meant by that is that every time we have an election, effectively a new government comes in because the new government is typically a new front bench or several faces

who are new, so it's frequently referred to as the government, those 18 to 26 people or so that are privileged to serve in that position.

However, we often hear comments, too, where people say: well, this government has been in power for so many years. It's not only in Alberta that this happens. It happens elsewhere. But a distinction ought to be made and understood that when we're referring to the government in this House, we're talking about this government because that's all that this government and its front benches can comment on: their own actions, their own policies. In the same way that members in opposition wouldn't be expected to be responsible for comments or policies developed by their predecessors, it's the same on the government side.

Number two, we should never use the points of order section of our proceedings here to continue debate. I do accept and understand that it's oftentimes necessary to clarify party positions or government positions or whatever, and I think that's what has happened here.

That having been said, the caution has been given. We're not going to accept this as a point of order but as a matter of clarification, and we're going to move on.

On that happy note, we are going to move on to an adjournment which will see the House reconvene tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:09 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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