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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 22, 2013

Issue 49

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
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Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 22, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

Let us begin with our daily prayer. Let us pray for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we have been elected to serve. Let us also pray for the protection of citizens who live in other parts of our country and for those innocent victims who become victimized by vicious acts of violence. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our nation's national anthem led by none other than M. Paul Lorieau. Please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Merci beaucoup, M. Lorieau.

Thank you, gentlemen and ladies. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Vytautas Žalys, who is the ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania. Also joining him are Ms Nejolla Korris, the honorary consul of Lithuania in Edmonton and the chair of the Edmonton consular corps, and Mr. Arūnas Staškevičius, who is the honorary consul of the Republic of Lithuania in Montreal.

Mr. Speaker, our relationship with Lithuania dates back to 1904, when Lithuanian immigrants began to arrive in Alberta. Today more than 3,000 Albertans are of Lithuanian descent, and Alberta's Lithuanian community continues to actively promote its heritage in our province. Lithuania was, for example, this year's host country of the 33rd annual Consular Corps Ball, which took place in Edmonton this last Saturday. This event was a great success and another opportunity to showcase wonderful Lithuanian artists in Alberta.

It is a great pleasure to welcome His Excellency on his official visit to our province. We look forward to continuing the positive relationship that exists between Alberta and Lithuania over the years to come. His Excellency, Ms Korris, and Mr. Staškevičius are seated in the Speaker's gallery. In fact, they are now standing in the Speaker's gallery. I ask that our honoured guests be welcomed with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, while our guests are still standing, you may be interested to know that the large canopy that now envelops and frames the Speaker's chair was installed in this Chamber in 1980. It was a gift from the city of Edmonton to

commemorate the province's 75th birthday. What you may not know, however, is that the canopy was designed by Paul Van Imschoot of Stony Plain, and it was built by Titas Uogintas of Edmonton, who originally came from Lithuania.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great group of students from the Bears paw Christian School, located in my constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View. Together with students from six other Christian schools across the province these engaged junior high school students have come to watch their elected officials in action today. They also told me – I had the pleasure of meeting them beforehand – that they regularly say prayers for all of us in here, so I think we can all be grateful for that. I would ask the nine grade 5 students from Bears paw Christian School to please rise with teacher Rebecca Bock, principal Judy Huffman, and parent Lisa Dalgleish and receive the traditional welcome from all of us here in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to welcome and also to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of students from the Drayton Christian school in the neighbouring constituency to the west of my own, and that's Drayton Valley-Devon. On behalf of their MLA, the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, I am pleased to welcome here these 17 bright grade 6 students along with their leaders, Mr. Jordan Pauls and Mrs. Jeanine Johnson. They've toured the Legislature. They've learned a great deal about the building and provincial government and how it works. We're really happy to have them here today to watch these proceedings. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 20 friendly and enthusiastic students from my constituency from the Fort Saskatchewan Christian school. They're here with their teacher, Mrs. Elaine Baillie, and parent helper Mrs. Susanne Wiens. Before this session started, they presented me with a plaque, and I would like to just mention what that plaque said. It was presented to me along with all those who call themselves Albertans and seek to live up to our name: Alberta, bright through nobility. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a rare occasion that I receive visitors from the constituency of Lesser Slave Lake, so today I am so pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five bright minds from grades 7 to 9 from Koinonia Christian School in Slave Lake. They are accompanied by their teacher, Miss Jasmine Light.

I also have the great honour of introducing two home-schoolers today who have done extremely well, Mr. Speaker. They're with their parents, Carey and Heather Barnstable. They are seated in

the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 25 students from l'école St. Angela elementary school. They're here all week as part of the School at the Legislature, and they are here with their teacher, Mrs. Carmel Perry, and parent Angie Zills. If they could all stand up, please, and get a warm reception from the Legislature.

1:40

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several students from the Saddle Lake Christian school, part of a larger group of Christian schools visiting the Legislature today. They are attending with my good friend Mavis Giant. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several students from the Wisdom Home Schooling Society, which is headquartered in my constituency of Derwent. They're accompanied by Mr. Carey Barnstable and Mrs. Heather Barnstable. Mr. Speaker, I'm encouraged by these students attending the Legislature today so that they know that the Wildrose supports strong and diverse schooling options for Albertans, especially home-schooled children. I'd ask that these students rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups to be introduced? If not, let us move on to guests.

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, do you have some other guests to introduce?

Ms Fenske: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. The first is to introduce to you four people from my constituency who are sporting the Strathcona volunteer centre ribbon that recognizes the volunteers in the community. Mel and Wendy Marler are farmers from near Josephsburg. In a normal year they wouldn't be here today; they'd be out in the field. So we're thankful that they could take advantage of this. Mel serves on the Community Advisory Panel for Dow, and Wendy is very active in the Josephsburg Presents series, which is the longest running cultural series in Alberta.

With them today are Grant and Evelyn Osbaldeston, who also live near Josephsburg. Grant has retired from one of our local industries, and his volunteer portfolio is too lengthy to even mention, but he does volunteer for the Fort Historical Society. Next month they are going to host the Peoples of the North Saskatchewan. Evelyn, his wife, works in the small retail business sector in Sherwood Park, and she will benefit from our government's pooled registered pension plans legislation. She volunteers with her church, Partridge Hill United church. I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Norma Hayward Ketchum and her brother Roy Loyek, two of 12 children. Norma is a resident of Red Deer county. She is a retired registered nurse and a full-time caregiver for her brother Roy, a PDD recipient and former resident of Michener Centre. Norma is concerned with the 45 per cent cutback to PDD and the effects on Roy. Roy's transition from Michener some 25 years ago was not easy on him, his family, or his community. He was misunderstood, mistakes were made with his care, and the stress placed on one family member may have contributed to their untimely death. But after decades of struggles Roy has finally found a balance, and he has been rescued. Each week he spends 144 hours in Norma's care and the remaining 24 hours within the community under the care of PDD, enjoying activities like bowling, watching a movie, activities most of us take for granted. Norma is here with Roy to request investment into PDD caregiver support and to keep Michener open. Please join me in giving Norma and Roy a warm welcome to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First of all, I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a new member of my staff, Amy Lambe. Amy is a graduate of the University of Alberta and comes to us from the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, where she has a long history of volunteering and worked as a project co-ordinator for two years, providing human rights education opportunities around Edmonton and throughout the province. Amy has also worked for Global Youth Connect in Rwanda, where she supported youth from North America and Rwanda through intensive human rights education programs. She is my new executive assistant and as such faces the challenging task of keeping me in the right place at least at approximately the right time. I would now ask Amy to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you a constituent of mine, Kathryn Westlund. Kathryn has been facing numerous obstacles with her workers' compensation claim and the subsequent appeals process. It's now been over four years since Kathryn started the process of resolving her WCB claim. As a result, her ability to make decisions regarding her financial situation has been at a standstill. I would now ask Kathryn to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly some members of my constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Carmen Andrew and her daughters Emma and Leah Pilkington are joining us today. They're on spring break, and they chose to come and spend their day at the Legislature, which is, I think, a great privilege for us. Emma is a grade 9 student at Delburne school, and her sister Leah is in grade 6. Unfortunately, Delburne school is not able to visit the Legislature this year due to timing, so we're glad that you guys took some free time out of your day to come and see us today. Thank you. I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for your first of two introductions.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my friend Connor Haakenson, who recently completed the Japanese Fushimi exchange program this spring. Connor had nothing but amazing things to say about Japan. We had the opportunity to meet before he went, and he assured me that he and his classmates were incredibly excited to experience the culture, the food, and all that Japan had to offer. One of the major differences he's mentioned since returning home is the superior level of technology within the country. Specifically, he talked about seeing a vending machine in a back alley that talked and had a digital screen which played music and offered a variety of drinks. Now, I can assure you that my days of listening to music and drinking in back alleys are behind me, but the degree of passion with which Connor speaks about this amazing country inspires me to visit it one day. I'd ask that Connor and his father, Gerald Haakenson, and his mother, Carol Haakenson, seated in the members' gallery today, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a long-term resident of Medicine Hat, a small-business owner there but also a very keen and passionate Albertan for our political process. Jordan Lien is the regional director of the Medicine Hat Progressive Conservative association. I would ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce two gentlemen who are here with the Christian schools today. They are seated in the members' gallery. To you and through you I would like to introduce Tim Schindel, who provides ministerial support to the B.C. Legislature, and with him is Larry Lindoff. I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Organ and Tissue Donations

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here today to once again speak about human organ and tissue donation during this week of national awareness. I may sound like a broken record to many of you; however, I am not apologetic. In fact, I will continue to talk about this issue until the dire state of organ donation procurement here in Alberta has improved considerably. We have one of the worst donation rates in the country.

Most of us are not even aware of organ and tissue donation unless we have been personally affected. For most Albertans awareness never goes further than signing the back of their Alberta health care card. Few of us realize that in most cases even if we were to die and wanted to donate our organs, many things preclude the chance to be a donor. In fact, a recent study found that 8 per cent of donor candidates that come through the emergency room doors actually made it to the donor process after death. An abysmal 8 per cent.

Donation of organs requires a well-thought-out plan. Medical personnel must co-ordinate between emergency departments and

organ donation programs. It involves having trained hospital staff in every hospital, staff able to ask sensitive questions of families. Yes, family consent is still required even though a person has signed his or her Alberta health care card. In fact, family consent has decreased from 85 per cent just over a decade ago to a staggering 45 per cent today because of lack of awareness and the neglect of families to have talked about the issue.

Hon. members, 62 Albertans have died needlessly waiting for the gift of life since my last organ donation member's statement over a year ago today. A co-ordinated approach to address the problems of our current system could have saved the lives of many of these individuals. The time to act is now.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health continues to undermine confidence in the public health system, especially on the issue of health executive expenses. For months the Premier and the minister have said that the past is the past, but on Thursday the minister bragged that the former CEO of Capital health had paid back an expense she approved to send one of her VPs to the Mayo Clinic in 2007. It turns out that past expense account abuse is a big deal after all. Does the minister now agree that there are other offensive expenses that should also be paid back?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The circumstances that we discussed last week were very troubling to the Minister of Health and to our government, and that is one of the reasons that on Thursday the Minister of Health asked former Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench Allan Wachowich to provide advice to him directly on whether or not there were opportunities to deal with these circumstances. We're looking forward to that advice because, as we said last week, we don't think that they were appropriate, and if there is any possible way to deal with that, then we will.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you. I accept that the minister made the announcement Thursday that he was asking a retired judge to examine potential ways to recover expense money paid to health executives. Now it seems that the minister actually is interested in what happened before the creation of the Alberta Health superboard after telling Albertans many, many times that it was time to look forward and forget the past. So what changed?

Ms Redford: One thing that we are most concerned with as a government is ensuring that we are protecting taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. If there are situations where we think that there are steps that we need to take, we want to make sure that we are getting the best possible advice with respect to that. That doesn't change the fact that in the past 18 months this government, elected a year ago tomorrow, put in place changes to the expense policy guidelines to ensure that this can never happen again.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to see the Premier and the minister seem to have had a conversion on the road to Damascus

and now agree with the opposition's view that health executive expenses need to be reviewed in detail and paid back. He's got a judge looking at potential legal remedies. The only thing missing is a full forensic audit of all of the health executives' expenses going back to the Merali era. When can we expect that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health has already said that Alberta Health Services has made a decision with respect to how to deal with those expenses. We think that's appropriate. We're going to ensure wherever possible that if circumstances do arise, we have the best possible advice as to what steps to take in order to recover taxpayer dollars, and we'll move forward.

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

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last week we revealed that Michele Lahey, a former health executive, billed taxpayers for a visit to the Mayo Clinic. Now, the Premier said that she was disgusted, the minister said that he was outraged, and that prompted the former CEO of Capital health who had approved these expenses to pay back the \$7,200 cost of treatment plus interest. Now, there are tens of thousands of dollars in other questionable expenses that we have raised in the past. I'm wondering: will the Premier express disgust again so that maybe we can get some of those expenses paid back, too?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will not stand in this House and concede that all of the suggestions made by the opposition are somehow accurate simply because they said them, but there is no doubt that there are circumstances that do arise from time to time. It's why we're going to pursue advice that will allow us wherever possible to deal with these issues where it's appropriate. We believe fundamentally that everything we do has to be about ensuring that we're being custodians of taxpayers' dollars, that we're ensuring the integrity of a public health care system to ensure that people can continue to have confidence and not see fearmongering from the other side of the House.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, here's another expense that Ms Lahey incurred and that the Capital health CEO approved. In April of 2005 Ms Lahey and her husband attended the Hope Foundation gala fundraiser, where her husband bought a luxury dinner for four at the live auction for \$1,200. Ms Lahey then expensed her husband's \$1,200 donation, and the CEO of Capital health approved it. Is the Premier or anyone disgusted by that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as we see continually, these circumstances are possibly arising, and what we've asked the opposition to do is to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to provide the information to independent agencies that can take a look at these matters. There is no doubt as we move forward and we take a look at some of these circumstances that if there are opportunities to deal with them, we will. But let's also keep in mind that the regulations that are in place, the expense guidelines that we have put in place and we've asked Alberta Health Services to follow, will ensure that this does not happen again.

Ms Smith: Here's some more taxpayer-funded philanthropy by Ms Lahey's husband: November 2005, \$4,300 for a Heavenly Evening of Dining auction item; May 2006, \$1,700 at another function; \$3,000 more in 2007, all paid for by Ms Lahey's husband on his credit card, which she then expensed to taxpayers. Is the Premier or anyone else disgusted by that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's entirely appropriate to raise these issues. There's no reason for us not to look into them, and we will.

But I will say something else, and I'd like to remind the opposition of this. While these circumstances that we're talking about are certainly disappointing, we want to make sure that we've dealt with them. [interjections] We've taken steps to ensure they can't happen again. We've taken steps to ensure there's the opportunity to recover, but let's keep in mind that what we did as a government, elected a year ago tomorrow, was ensured we instituted changes to make . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hear a few members in the rows of the Wildrose opposition starting to interject more and more as the questions build. I don't hear anybody interjecting when the questions are being asked. Let's not interject when the answers are being given. You may like the answers; you may not. But it doesn't give cause for you to create any disorder. So please let us be respectful. Let's change the tone as we all said we would try to do last year. It would just be a wonderful world, wouldn't it?

Let's proceed on with your third main set of questions.

Prescription Drug Coverage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health is systematically undermining the public's confidence in the health care system. Changing pharmacy pricing is just the most recent example, yet the minister defends his Fred-icare plan, insisting that drug prices are dropping. Not true. There are examples galore, and they affect patients. We'll hear more about that in a subsequent question. Life-saving medicines that were one price last month are double, triple, or more this month. It affects their health, and it affects their lives. When is the minister going to scrap this horrible plan and put patients first?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the introduction of changes that the Minister of Health has proposed with respect to generic drugs is doing exactly that. We've made responsible and tough choices to ensure that our public health care system continues to remain sustainable, that Alberta taxpayers get good value for their money, and that Albertans can afford medication. As we move forward, we have every confidence that through this transition phase we're able to see tremendous success and opportunity, and we look forward to that continuing.

Ms Smith: The minister has been telling Albertans a number of things about his pharmacy plan that are simply not true. He claimed that there are multiple manufacturers for all of our drugs. This is false. The sole supplier of penicillin is Apotex. The old price was \$71 per thousand pills. The new Fred-icare price is \$178 per thousand pills. Will the Premier take her minister to task and give him the opportunity to admit his mistake and tell the Assembly the truth about his Fred-icare?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I expect within the next little while we'll see these sorts of specific examples that are misleading to Albertans. The reason for that is that what we've done as the government is that we have absolutely changed the way that the government of Alberta purchases medication. That doesn't mean that in some cases you may not see increases in some and decreases in others, but what we have confidence in is that this plan reduces the cost of medication to Albertans, to the Alberta

health care system and ensures that we can continue to have a sustainable system that supports vulnerable people.

2:00

Ms Smith: I'll help the Premier with the math. Penicillin is now two and half times higher in price.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is also trying to convince Albertans that as a result of consultations with pharmacists the pharmacists agree with the changes. They don't. Can the minister answer a question from a pharmacist in the Banff-Cochrane constituency? I'm sure that the MLA wishes he could ask this question on his behalf. Who in their right mind would agree that it is best to sell products at a loss and put their business at risk?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, here is the difference between the government and the opposition. As I've said very clearly and as our Minister of Health has said, our primary responsibility is to ensure that our health care system is sustainable and that all Albertans have access to medication. We have ensured that we've consulted with pharmacists. We understand that there are some pharmacists who have business models where this transition is challenging. We are supporting them, but I'll tell you that our first obligation is not the same as the Leader of the Opposition's. The Leader of the Opposition says that she's opposed to corporate subsidies, which doesn't seem to be the case. [interjections]

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

Funding for Education

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of the 2012 election. In his column Don Braid talks about the Premier. He states, "She rarely admits a mistake; indeed, she won't even concede that promises made in the election campaign have been broken." One such promise was to bring in full-day kindergarten. Promise made, promise broken. To the Premier: why did you promise full-day kindergarten when you had no intention of honouring that promise? Was it just a ploy to win votes? Why, Premier?

Ms Redford: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, whether it's our Minister of Education or our Minister of Human Services talking about this issue, we will talk about the fact that all-day kindergarten matters to Albertans, because we're fundamentally committed to ensuring that early childhood development is a foundation for the future. We already see in over half of the jurisdictions in this province the opportunity for all-day kindergarten, and as we move forward, we are transitioning more and more programs to that. Local school boards are involved in making these decisions that are appropriate for their families. We'll continue to support it, and to suggest that we're not going to get there is completely misleading.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't need this Premier to talk; they need her to walk.

In the election the Premier promised to end child poverty in five years, to revisit minimum wage, and to end all poverty in 10 years, yet after 42 years this government doesn't even have a working definition of poverty nor any money budgeted to end it. One year has gone by, and more than 70,000 Alberta kids are waiting to be appropriately fed, clothed, housed, and brought out of poverty. Promise made, promise broken. [interjections] To the Premier: why are you playing politics with the most vulnerable members of our society instead of helping them?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the presumptions of the hon. member are absolutely absurd. First of all, there are no magic wands. Nobody promised that everything would be done on day 1. We have a four-year mandate, and we will fulfill that four-year mandate. [interjections] The hon. member says that there's no definition of poverty. If he went back to the estimates, at which the Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised the same issue, he'd understand that social issues belong to the community and have to be worked on with the community. There are many definitions of poverty. [interjections] We are working on making sure that there's common cause in this province so that we actually do succeed in achieving these very, very laudable goals.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: All right. We now have hecklings and interjections by the Liberals and by the New Democrat opposition and even a few from the government side. Again I ask: could you please all come back to some sense of civility and decorum before this gets escalated to the point where I have to interject even more?

Hon. member, your final question.

Funding for Education (continued)

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this minister talks about magic wands. Our kids are getting lumps of coal.

During the election my daughter and her friends at the University of Alberta read election slogans where the Premier told students she'd walked in their shoes and promised to prepare Alberta for the future by investing in their education. Instead, we've seen the most draconian cuts to postsecondary education in decades and even the cancellation of STEP funding. Promise made, promise broken. To the Premier: how exactly did you decide that chaos, fear, and uncertainty were what our postsecondary institutions needed to prepare our young people and our province for the future?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we see a lot of examples of spreading chaos, fear, and uncertainty, but they're coming from that side of the House. Nonetheless, we're very aware of the fact that postsecondary funding in this budget makes up more than 5 per cent of our budget. This is an area where we have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being used effectively for research and innovation, to train our students, not wasted on administrative costs. Everything that our minister is doing is working with presidents and boards of governors to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent effectively. You know, we've seen incredible investments in the past 10 years, and we think we can ensure that this continues.

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

Seniors' Drug Coverage

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is breaking another promise, this time to Alberta seniors. As a PC leadership candidate in a letter dated September 6, 2011, this Premier assured seniors she would "cancel the proposed Alberta Senior's Drug Strategy and retain the current program." Now as Premier she's looking to replace the current plan with an income-adjusted plan that could see seniors paying hundreds or even thousands more for their prescriptions. To the Premier: why have

you broken another promise, this time to our most vulnerable citizens?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the comments made with respect to ASDS were important because we wanted to make sure that we were putting in place a system that did take care of the most vulnerable Albertans. The work that our Minister of Health is doing on pharmacare is ensuring that that is exactly what will happen. This program will ensure access for 20 per cent of Albertans that currently do not have drug coverage. The work that he's doing with respect to generic drugs is going to ensure that the price of medication goes down. Everything we're doing is about ensuring that medication is more accessible for everyone in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Second question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In this Premier's letter she clearly stated that income-based supports for prescriptions are "a poor repayment" for seniors' contributions to building Alberta. Just before the election the Health minister underlined the commitment to seniors, saying that government has no intention to make changes to the plan. That was before the election, and this is after. To the Premier: why didn't you tell Alberta seniors the truth?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, what we told Alberta seniors and all Albertans was that we wanted to ensure that we had a pharmacare system and a drug system that ensured that the most vulnerable people were protected. As we move forward, that's exactly what we have. We saw the opportunity in the past 12 months to do something better than what we'd actually thought was in place before. We're committed to doing that not only to serve Albertans and Alberta taxpayers but also to ensure that we're allowing our health care system to continue to be sustainable. We're committed to that.

Mr. Mason: Before the last election this Premier made so many promises to so many people that they could fill the Saddledome. Clearly, this Premier will say anything to anyone in order to get elected. Now she's tricked vulnerable seniors into voting for her by making promises she had no intention of keeping. Premier, have you no shame?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is a government that wants to ensure and has ensured with this budget that we are protecting vulnerable Albertans across the board, whether they are seniors or otherwise. I'll talk about some promises we made that we kept. We promised to protect vulnerable Albertans, to hold the line on spending, to not increase taxes, to improve pharmacare, to fund insulin pumps, to build family care clinics, to build new schools, to fast-track emergency rooms, and to renew our fiscal policy framework. We made those commitments and we kept those commitments and we're proud of those commitments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Safe Communities Innovation Fund

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of this year's back-in-debt budget that cut all funding to the safe communities innovation fund, Servants Anonymous has been desperately trying to find sustainable funding for their SAFE house. For the past three years the SAFE house has provided women and children the

support necessary to exit the violence of prostitution, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. Last week the Minister of Human Services indicated to me that his ministry will be finding a way to sustain the funding for the SAFE house due to the success of the program. Can the minister tell this House when Servants Anonymous can expect your call?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the hon. member was doing last week was raising questions and talking about budget cuts, which was entirely inaccurate. What actually happened with respect to that particular program and a number of others that were funded under safe com was that they knew that their grants were one-, two-, or three-year grants, and they were expiring. They were working on a transition plan to sustainability. Our department is working on those transition plans with respect to those projects, which need to be continued to sustain those ones that were successful, and we'll continue to do that.

2:10

Mr. Wilson: A cut is a cut is a cut, Minister.

Given that other pilot programs under the safe communities innovation fund are beginning to feel the heat as a result of this government's misguided priorities and given that just last week the government insisted that funding had dried up for all SCIF programs, can the minister outline what other front-line services that were going to be cut last week are now deemed funded this week?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues to intentionally change the facts. The facts are that SCIF projects were funded with specific grants for one, two, or three years. Those grants expired. They weren't renewable. They weren't ongoing. They were term certain. During that period of time the projects were to determine, first of all, whether they achieved results, and then, secondly, how they were going to be sustainable. That discussion about how they were going to be sustainable is a discussion which they needed to engage in with the appropriate departments so that appropriate programs can go forward. It's not a budget cut. It's a grant that expired.

Mr. Wilson: Given that the government has indicated it will backtrack on the decision to cancel funding for Servants Anonymous and apparently some other very deserving programs, will the government now overturn its stubborn decision to close to the Michener Centre, or will it continue to bulldoze ahead with its pattern of miscommunication around cuts to the front-line services that matter most to vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, let's set the record straight here. The hon. member stands and complains about cuts despite the fact that they propose that we cut \$2 billion from the budget. Nonetheless, our PDD budget wasn't cut. It's increased in this year's budget. The only person who has proposed a cut in the PDD budget by way of amendment, which we'll vote on tonight, is that hon. member. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Okay. Whoever is hooting and hollering over here, enough. You know, this may surprise some of you, but there are people who watch question period. There are people who come to the galleries expecting to listen to question period. Do you know

what? They expect those of us who were elected here to be role models for them and for others. Did you know that? Now, just take a look at your own decorum over this last little while. Is that the kind of role modelling you would like to see? Even while I'm speaking, some of you are talking to each other. Is that how you are in your own homes in your own communities? I don't think so. Why, then, would you try to be like that here? Come on.

I know question period isn't as exciting for some as it is for others, but it's a serious time to hold the government accountable. That's what it's all about. So let's let members who ask questions have that right, and let's have government members offer up their explanations. Wouldn't that be a wonderful world? It's the second time I'm asking you.

Let us move onward. Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill, followed by Airdrie.

Joint Oil Sands Environmental Monitoring

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Energy. Albertans know that developing our energy resources comes with an environmental cost in the generation of greenhouse gasses that do cause climate change and in impacts on air, land, and watersheds. But Albertans want to know the facts. Given the widespread criticism of our old monitoring systems, what is the minister doing to provide up-to-date information on environmental impacts from oil sands developments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the joint oil sands monitoring portal was launched today, very appropriately on Earth Day, and it will provide clear, open, and transparent access for anybody who wishes to take a look at it, information about the air, the water, soil, and biodiversity in northeastern Alberta. This is a significant on-the-ground development in terms of having access for all Canadians and Albertans. We're very deeply committed to this, working with the government of Canada.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: given that the joint environmental plan was announced in February 2012, what on-the-ground enhancements have been put in place to provide the data, and how can the minister assure Albertans that the new portal will have some scientific credibility?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, that's what it's all about, ensuring that there is scientific credibility to the work that's going on, that it's out there for all to review.

Our Minister of ESRD and her federal counterpart have undertaken tremendous hard work since February of 2012, when they announced this. We're broadening monitoring of contaminants specific to the oil sands and implementing an expanded groundwater monitoring network as well. Those are just a couple of examples of the additional monitoring that's available publicly.

Dr. Brown: Given the importance of our oil sands to Alberta, Canada, and, in fact, to North America can the minister advise how this new data is going to help to clear up some of PR campaigns of misinformation about our oil sands developments?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, what we have to do as Albertans is ensure that science is our friend. Science is helpful to all of us to help ensure that the facts are out there, that we're able to put our case forward, that people can contest it and take a look at the facts and understand it and analyze it. Canada and Alberta are working closely to ensure that this is out there, that we're

working together on our environmental policies. Meanwhile the opposition, of course, are still scratching their heads about what science is and which science they actually believe.

Crossmunicipal Taxi Fares

Mr. Anderson: The taxi shortage in the city of Calgary is well documented, and although the majority of the problem must be dealt with by the city, it is starting to affect those from communities outside of Calgary, including my own. Airdrie taxi drivers are forbidden to pick up Airdrie residents from Calgary and bring them back to Airdrie and are fined \$1,500 for doing so even though the shortage of Calgary taxis means hours of waiting. To the Minister of Transportation: why don't we do what most other jurisdictions have done and allow for a crossmunicipal taxi licence so that Airdrie drivers aren't penalized for serving members in their own communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member probably knows – and I guess there was a time in my life when I spent nine years dealing with this amongst other issues – the municipalities have the authority over the taxi business. I guess the hon. member wants to wrestle that authority from them. That's an issue that he may want to bring forward in a proposal. But right now municipalities are duly elected, really not unlike us, and at this point I don't know of any plans to take away their duly elected authority.

Mr. Anderson: It's intermunicipal trade. We don't make buses and charters do that. Why should we do that for taxis?

Given this minister is always touting how he is cracking down on drunk driving and given that having timely access to a cab would do far more to prevent drunk driving and be a lot more cost efficient than, say – oh, I don't know – going after those at .05, will the minister agree to develop a permit that allows taxi drivers to pick up those living in their communities, whether that's a Calgary taxi picking up a Calgarian from an Airdrie bar or vice versa?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we've got a volunteer organization called the Calgary Regional Partnership, where municipalities have come together and continue to come together to address the challenges with long-term regional planning, land-use planning. At the meeting we had on Thursday evening, we discussed water use, we discussed business licences, and we discussed a lot of other things, an example of which this member has listed, which can help make the Calgary Regional Partnership stronger and make it more competitive down the road to better serve every single one of its clients instead of defending themselves against borders, which are really arbitrary. It's about working together.

Mr. Anderson: Given that the reason Airdrie taxis cannot afford to run a wheelchair accessible van is because they are not permitted to return with customers from hospitals or other facilities in Calgary even if they brought them there in the first place and given that this is a major restriction on the mobility of seniors and the disabled living in communities outside of Calgary, Minister, will you show just a little compassion and perhaps a little common sense and allow taxis from Airdrie, Chestermere, and others to at the very least pick up seniors and the disabled from Calgary locations so they can be brought home to our communities in a timely and safe fashion?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, this is a municipal issue, and we continually respect municipalities and their ability not only to solve their own problems but to work together to come up with long-term solutions.

I find it very ironic that half the members on that side are working to undermine the Calgary Regional Partnership and cause more division while we on this side respect municipalities and encourage them to constantly work together to address these solutions because we all, from every single municipal jurisdiction in the province, serve the same clients.

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

2:20 Seniors' Property Tax Deferral Program

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of Budget 2013 it was announced that the seniors' property tax deferral program will be implemented so seniors can keep more money in their pockets by deferring property taxes till they sell their homes. To the Associate Minister of Seniors. We know that seniors are facing rising expenses, including my parents. We know that even seniors who own their own home are not immune to the added burden of rising property values, including my parents. How will the seniors' property tax deferral program actually deal with this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, the voluntary program, the seniors' property tax deferral program, was announced today. Everybody is going to have the opportunity in their offices to have information packages. The Treasury Branches have information packages. The Seniors websites have information packages. This opportunity for seniors to defer the equity in their home will give the opportunity for seniors to decide how best they spend their money. Whether they just spend it on extra groceries, whether they spend it on a trip, that's up to them. It gives them a low-cost interest to be able to achieve this.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: how will this program work, and when can the seniors start applying?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite simply they can start applying today, and the qualifications for this program are pretty simple. You have to be 65 years old with 25 per cent equity in your home. Fill out the application, and the process will roll.

Mr. Fraser: Given that Calgary seniors who can't live at home are waiting for placement into higher level care facilities, not long-term placement but a home with 24-hour care, what is this government doing to provide these spaces for Albertans who have built this province?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear in the budget document that we have an opportunity for enhanced housing and continuing care for communities across the province. Sir, if you and others in this Assembly pass this budget tonight, we'll be able to roll out this program and make some announcements very, very soon. If you vote against the budget, we won't have the opportunity to do that.

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

Municipal Charters

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During her leadership race, the election, and on other occasions the Premier promised a big-city charter for Edmonton and Calgary. Now, whether this was one big-city charter referring to both cities or two separate charters, the Edmonton charter and the Calgary charter, the details are not worked out. But there is no question. I heard the promise, Edmonton heard the promise, and Calgary heard the promise. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is the minister now saying that this will not happen in any way, shape, or form?

Mr. Griffiths: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've never said that. In fact, I've stood every single time in this House and said that we continue to work on the charter. We're making incredible progress, but keep in mind that I'm not the only signatory to this. We're respecting the discussions with the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton as we try and craft a charter, and we still anticipate that we will have one come forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, the minister is quoted in *Hansard* as saying that he is very much opposed to creating classes of municipalities. My question to the minister is: why not? What we have are different classes of municipalities.

Mr. Griffiths: We have currently still one of the most progressive municipal government acts in all of Canada, and we're working to rewrite the Municipal Government Act to make sure that it is the most progressive in all of North America for another generation to come, Mr. Speaker. That means that we're working with all of our municipalities to make sure that they have the appropriate roles, the appropriate responsibilities, and the opportunities to govern themselves as best they can for the citizens they represent. That's the ultimate solution for every single municipality in this province.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Edmonton and Calgary have already proved their maturity, their population base, and therefore their need for a separate charter and they have the support of their village, town, and small-city colleagues, what has the minister got against these two cities – or maybe it's the two mayors – that he keeps blocking a big-city charter for these two cities?

Mr. Griffiths: As I've said before, our administrations continue to work together. We continue to work together as politicians, Mr. Speaker, on a charter for the municipalities. I have absolutely nothing against them. They have a tremendous amount of capacity, and we have to make sure that the charter, which is about the relationship between those municipalities in the province, is set up so that we can all function most effectively. I will not and cannot simply sign off and mandate what the charter will look like. I work with my municipal colleagues to create one, and they're not ready to sign it either because we're still discussing the details of that charter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Corporate Taxes

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we hear that the province just lost \$120 million because two major corporations, using

Alberta's tax loopholes, avoided paying what is the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada. This PC government fails to even collect the lowly sum it asks corporations to pay. Billions have been left on the table, and everything from health care to road maintenance is left to suffer. To the Minister of Finance: let's just make this clear. Your government is willing to carry on with cuts to public services rather than compelling corporations to pay their fair share.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is more or less misleading this House when he suggests that this is an Alberta tax loophole. It was nothing of the kind, and he should perhaps do his homework. The fact is that we actually took this all the way to the Supreme Court. We did everything in our power to try to recoup as much as we possibly could and did actually recoup close to \$80 million.

The actual loophole that this was under is actually in the Ontario jurisdiction. The Ontario government has worked with us. We've changed it, we've closed it, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, we are aggressively pursuing any others that we may find.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, given that this government relies on corporate tax to account for only about 12 per cent of its total budget – and apparently our government can't even collect that properly – and given that this PC government has turned its poor revenue management practices into an excuse to cut public services, how can this minister possibly defend a budget that hurts Alberta families while his government allows massive corporations to get away without paying their taxes as they should?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the question was entirely inappropriate and unfactual, I'm going to give my answer, which is factual, and that is that we will aggressively pursue anyone who is not abiding by our tax laws in our jurisdiction and beyond if they're paying taxes in this province. We will continue to take matters to the highest court in this land if we believe that we have even the slightest chance of winning. We will also honour the courts in this land because that's what we do in this province.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta still does not use the much more efficient Canada Revenue Agency for collecting corporate tax and given that this PC government has been dishing out poorly thought-out and unsustainable corporate tax cuts for more than 10 years, will this minister cut our collective losses now, set a reasonable corporate tax rate, and stop this bargain basement race to the bottom that only seems to benefit large corporations with large offshore accounts and small armies of clever tax lawyers like Deloitte Touche?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I might suggest to him that he's probably extremely lucky that he said that in this House and not outside those doors.

Mr. Speaker, this government with the tax policy that we have has done some interesting things. It has created the strongest economy in our country. It has created an economy that has some of the lowest unemployment rates in our country. We have the strongest financial position of any jurisdiction, I would say, in North America. Albertans told us to live within our means, and that's exactly what this budget is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Prescription Drug Coverage

(continued)

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has gone to great lengths and spent a lot of taxpayers' dollars telling Albertans that generic drug prices would be coming down. However, a pharmacist in my constituency recently had to inform one of her patients that he now has to pay more than double what he used to for his morphine. Previously he paid about \$68. Now he's paying \$155. In her e-mail to me she said, quote: he was so upset, and I felt like crying. To the Health minister: how many more stories like this do you need to hear before you realize that your centralized Fred-icare program is a total failure?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the minister the minister has made it very, very clear that the health system in this province is and is going to be and will remain publicly funded. We need to make sure, you know, for now and for the future that our publicly funded system is operated properly in the most efficient way. I think the pharmacare program is one of those programs very, very clearly laid out by the minister. We are going to have an opportunity for all Albertans to have a great program going forward, where those that are in most need will get the best benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hale: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Not quite sure where that was going.

Given that morphine patients don't have the luxury of choosing to go off their medication and given that this patient in particular just can't afford such a drastic increase to his medication, how can this minister look at Albertans square in the eye and say that his centralized Fred-icare program is good medicine?

2:30

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I stand by the comments that I made. If there are any individual concerns that the member wants to bring forward, not in this Assembly but to the minister's office, I'm sure that the minister will handle that in a timely fashion.

Mr. Hale: He doesn't seem to ever return my calls.

Given that when this pharmacist told her patient of the increased price, the first words out of his mouth were, "I thought drug prices were going down," will the Health minister immediately apologize to this patient and all Albertans for this misleading advertising campaign and admit that his centralized Fred-icare program for generic drugs has completely backfired?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic about these situations that occur right now. The program starts to kick in later on this year. The new generic pricing will kick in May 1. We haven't even got to where the member is talking about. Again, if the member has specific concerns that he wants to bring for a constituent, he can bring them to me or to the Health minister's office. I make a commitment to you that we'll help you out.

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

Supports for Vulnerable Albertans

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's budget focuses on supporting programs and services to the most vulnerable Albertans. I'm concerned about the gap that our province's income support program leaves for Albertans who exceed the

maximum income yet still do not earn enough to meet their basic needs. My first question is to the Minister of Human Services. When was the income support program last reviewed and evaluated to adapt to the changing needs of vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, any Albertan can access our Alberta Works centres. There are 53 of them in communities throughout the province. In those centres they'll find services and programs to support them, including information on training and employment programs to help with funding or linking the individual to appropriate short-term assistance. If the Albertan is dealing with an immediate emergency, they can qualify for a one-time issue of benefits. As well, they or family members might qualify for health benefits. Our staff will assess the whole person and their individual needs. In short, Alberta Works centres are there to help all Albertans in their time of need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the maximum income that a family can earn and still be eligible for income support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When providing appropriate income support, each situation and individual is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. There's no specific income maximum amount as benefits and services provided are based on an assessment of the person's situation such as the number of dependents, living arrangements, income exemptions, and so forth. There are eligibility thresholds. For example, for a single parent with one child under 10 years of age where the parent is not working and renting an apartment, the threshold would be \$933 per month. But you can tell by that example that there could be many different circumstances, and each individual is assessed on their own circumstances.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: does your ministry plan to offer income support for Albertans who fall outside of that limit while perhaps mandating a proactive repayment plan or financial counselling?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would indicate that the application process includes a comprehensive review of an individual's budgetary needs and issues. If they're not eligible for income supports, they may be eligible for one-time support to get through an emergency situation. They may be assisted to find a better job or a stronger job position. We work with community agencies and not-for-profit agencies, so there may be an opportunity to find someone who can help them through their particular situation. It's a comprehensive approach, not a routine approach. Every individual is assessed on their particular need and aligned with the services that they need to get through that particular spot in their lives.

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

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, during budget estimates the Minister of Infrastructure made a stunning admission. The minister finally admitted that the cost of public-private partnerships is much higher than traditional builds. He said, "Usually the up-front cost is higher in a P3 than a traditional build." To the minister: why is your government so eager to build Alberta using this costly and ineffective means of financing projects?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: I'm going to go first, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to ask the hon. minister to supplement. I wanted to suggest to the hon. member that when you look at the financing package – and the up-front cost is what the minister had talked about – there is an up-front component of cash, and there is an ability for us to transfer the risk of the construction to the proponent, which is also built into the net present value of how we calculate it. The idea is to get the greatest value for the taxpayer both today and in the future life of the project.

Mr. Barnes: Given that this back-in-debt budget will take Albertans down a path of paying billions of dollars in interest and service fees to banks, why doesn't this government show some respect for taxpayers and future generations and reconsider its dangerous approach of relying so heavily on trading debt for infrastructure?

Mr. Horner: You know, it's rather interesting. Last week I happened to be at a luncheon with our federal Finance minister, Mr. Flaherty. He asked me what we were going to do with infrastructure and how we were going to fund it in the future. He was on his way to the IMF to talk about interest rates and where things are going. Both he and I talked about the value to taxpayers of using capital markets and P3s because it's the best way to get the best value for taxpayers. He was absolutely shocked when I said that the right wing, the people across the way, the Wildrose Alliance Party are opposed to P3s. He couldn't quite figure that out because they're supposed to be all about taxpayer value. Mr. Speaker, we are.

Mr. Barnes: We're very concerned how they're billing Alberta, not building Alberta.

Given that this government won't produce an infrastructure priority list and instead is mortgaging our children's futures with these costly borrowing schemes and cannot convince Albertans that the additional billions of dollars in interest being taken from their pockets isn't being done for political reasons, will the minister commit to giving Albertans the P3 they are really asking for, a public prioritized project list?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, once again that hardly made sense and was hard to follow and misquoted my budget. P3s save money. When you do a public-sector/private-sector comparator over the life of the project, P3s have saved this province lots of money. In fact, we've saved over \$2.2 billion since we started building with P3s. That's money that's gone into building infrastructure for all kinds of projects in this province. It would mean a lot fewer schools in your areas and ours if you didn't build with P3s. Make sure, when you quote, that you quote the whole thing.

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

New School Construction

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy we're talking about P3s. Since 2008 the government has built 40 schools Alberta-wide using a P3 model, which includes Florence Hallock in Edmonton-Decore. The P3 total dollar investment for schools since '08 is \$1.175 billion, for a cost savings of \$245 million over conventional construction. Many of my constituents are demanding more cost savings. To the Minister of Education: after the government formally announces to build and pay for new schools using a P3 model or approves an alternative funding option for new school construction, would the minister consider implementing a government-led procurement strategy . . .

The Speaker: I'll have to ask the hon. member to respond at this point.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Education. Our government is committed to living within our means and getting maximum value for taxpayers' dollars. That's why we look at creative instruments like P3s to make sure that we have the ability to get the services, to build the capital, the infrastructure that Albertans need today for the young children that need to go to school today and the seniors that need access to seniors' housing today. We'll continue to find innovative ways to continue to save money.

Mrs. Sarich: To the Minister of Service Alberta: given that you're responsible for government procurement, will there be any consideration currently or in the future of implementing a government-led procurement strategy with school boards for school desks, labs, chairs, tables, office desks, white boards, and technology?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you. We're already doing a lot of that work. As of today over 60 school boards, including, I believe, some charter schools, are taking advantage of what's known as standing offers. That's where the provincial government, Mr. Speaker, working with other sectors like the postsecondary sector, the education sector, and our municipalities come together to really capitalize on our buying power to ensure that we can get the best prices using the maximum dollar force that we in the province have in our capacity.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Edmonton-Decore constituents I really appreciate that response.

Again to the same minister: are there any steps in place to monitor the current practices of procurement by school boards, government boards, commissions, and agencies to ensure accountability and transparency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, as we said earlier, it's very important that we continue to ensure that our education sector as well as all of the other sectors that are funded by taxpayers' dollars continue to maximize taxpayers' dollars. They're expected to live up to a lot of the trade agreements that we as a province have signed off on. For example, for purchases over \$75,000 they are required to post on the Alberta Purchasing

Connection to make sure we extend every single dollar that is being spent that comes from our Alberta taxpayers.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will continue with private members' statements, starting with Chestermere-Rocky View.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Calgary-North West.

Highway 8 Twinning

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. On the west side of the riding of Chestermere-Rocky View there's a highway in desperate need of attention. That's highway 8. It begins to head west from the corner of Glenmore and Sarcee trails, and it travels through a growing residential area of western Calgary and Rocky View county. The highway has outgrown the role that it historically fulfilled, and it has become very dangerous. Last summer two teenage boys were killed just days apart, Dustin Peers and Chase Hudye. In each case the boy's vehicle crossed the center line and hit an oncoming tractor-trailer.

Now, highway 8 was never intended to be a trucking route. Truckers use it to avoid a steep climb on Sarcee Trail, but in doing so, they're clogging up a single-lane highway and contributing to the dangerous congestion. Traffic on highway 8 already exceeds the threshold for twinning with the average traffic count of 24,500 vehicles at Elbow Springs golf course. Single unit and tractor-trailer units at times make up close to 20 per cent of the vehicles on the highway.

Now, there is a very committed group of local residents that want to see truck traffic banned. At the very least the government should look at restricting it, particularly during peak hours. Eventually the Calgary ring road will solve these problems, but we can't sit idly by and wait, with the condition of this road getting worse.

One portion of that ring road could be built while we wait for a deal with Tsuu T'ina. I would encourage the minister to consider fast-tracking the west portion. It's going to be built either way, and it would alleviate many of the concerns for the people in west Calgary, Springbank, and Elbow Valley.

The government could also look at reducing the speed limit on the 100-kilometre-an-hour stretch so the highway isn't a convenient thoroughfare. After all, this highway is travelled by many school buses full of children.

The summer driving season is almost upon us. The time to act is now. We owe it to the people of west Calgary, Springbank, and Elbow Valley. Most of all we owe it to Chase Hudye, Dustin Peers, and their families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Juno Award Alberta Nominee

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Assembly today to pay tribute to some great Albertans. Last night the Juno award ceremony was held in Regina. There were 11 nominees from Alberta: from Edmonton Corb Lund, Kreesha Turner, Vivian Fung, the groups Purity Ring and Ten Second Epic, and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. From Calgary there was Jan

Lisiecki, R. Murray Schafer, Hugh Sicotte, and also the group Makeshift Innocence. From Grande Prairie there was Emerson Drive. From Hanna there was Nickelback.

The nominees really represent an impressive range of musical styles and expressions. They were nominated in individual and group categories, and in a very special part of the ceremony k.d. lang, the pride of Consort, Alberta, was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.

Mr. Speaker, we as Albertans strive to tell our story to the world. We want the world to know we are an open and diverse society, a place where hard work and dedication make dreams come true, a place of established traditions whose heart is always big enough to welcome a new perspective on the human journey, a place that prizes excellence in all things and whose musical artists help tell that story in the most eloquent way. Through the pursuit of artistic passion they bring us joy and distinction.

I would like to congratulate Vivian Fung of Edmonton, who won a Juno award last night for classical composition of the year. We're so proud of Vivian and all the sons and daughters of Alberta who represented our province at the Juno awards. We are so proud of them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know you'll want to listen equally attentively to the next member because it was on this day many years ago that he uttered his first words. Now let's hear how he has improved on them. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Support for Senior Citizens

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a society we owe our senior citizens a great amount of respect and compassion. Day in and day out these individuals worked incredibly hard to build the Alberta that we've all come to know and love today. Personally, I grew up in a Chinese family and inherited a very strong culture that respects the elderly being held in high virtue.

In fact, the red envelope exchange tradition, that many of you might be familiar with, is just such an example. At the time of the Chinese New Year the elderly give red envelopes with money in them, wishing the younger generation prosperity. The receiving generation pays tribute to the elderly to thank them for the care and support. In my family it's followed by bowing three times to your parents to thank them. I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that when I was in my turbulent junior years, I was trying to get rid of the second part. I wasn't successful.

On a more serious note, Mr. Speaker, my point is that respecting the elderly is a value that I believe we, all Albertans, embrace regardless of our cultural background. It is our utmost responsibility to make sure that our senior citizens have the necessary programs and support at their disposal so that they can enjoy their last stage of life with love, care, and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, as we proceed with today's budget vote, I'd like to urge the hon. members of this House to give proper support for seniors' programs. I believe Alberta is great only if it is great to all, including our vulnerable senior citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and happy birthday.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize one of Alberta's most vibrant and innovative economic sectors. Not only is it our largest renewable resource industry; this sector

also holds immense potential as we look to continue to diversify our already strong economy. I am talking about Alberta's agricultural industry, which continues to grow both domestically and internationally as we look to gain market access and a fair price for an array of Alberta's resources.

Our strong agricultural sector is one of our most forward-thinking industries. It is a leader in technological research and innovation through its employment of sustainable practices. The agricultural initiatives program funds many of these projects. This industry is the sector that our province's strong economic foundation was originally built on, and its value to our economy today should not be overlooked. After all, this sector employs 73,000 Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Canada is one of only five countries in the world that produces more than we consume.

Mr. Speaker, much of my constituency of Stony Plain is rural and has a significant number of farmers. It is crucial that we continue to support and nurture this important sector. As this government continues to build Alberta, I see the agricultural industry playing a crucial role in the diversification of our economy as it holds great potential for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:50

Liberal Election Promises

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow marks one year since the last provincial election, and the top issues a year ago are the top issues today. Last year the Alberta Liberals presented a plan to act on these issues, and that plan is still vitally relevant and bursting with common-sense solutions.

Increased funding for home care and nonprofit long-term care so that seniors are no longer warehoused in hospitals, ER wait times are reduced, and ambulances get back to the road quickly: we were right then, and we are right now. Eliminating school fees for K to 12, making schools community hubs, starting a provincial school lunch program, expanding registered apprenticeship programs, and an end to overcrowded classrooms: we were right then, and we're right now. Increasing our investment in postsecondary education so that it is more affordable and accessible, so class sizes are reduced, so postsecondary institutions have stable and predictable funding: we were right then, and we're right now. Apply the carbon levy to actual emissions and create an important source of revenue to fund environmental innovation and transit options for cities and towns, thereby repairing this province's poor environmental reputation, which is hurting our economy: we were right then, and we're right now.

Last year the Alberta Liberals said that it was time to stop spending all of our nonrenewable resource revenue. We said that it was time to stop tying the funding of vital public services to the price of a barrel of oil and that the way to do this was to bring back progressive income tax and modestly increase the tax on large corporations to 12 per cent. Stable, predictable funding for vital services and money going into the savings account every year: we were right then, and we're right now. Mr. Speaker, I can only hope that someday soon this government will also be right instead of taking a hard turn to the right.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Alberta Liberals it was an honour for me to celebrate the one-year anniversary of a truly forward-thinking, common-sense, honest plan for Albertans.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, do you have a tabling today?

Mr. Bikman: I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters from concerned pharmacists. Dennis Strong, owner of Woods Dispensary, and Craig Jensen and David Wright, owners of Johnson's Taber Drugs, are concerned that the schedule of prices that's been put out recently is nonbinding as per clause 17.1. Two tablings there.

Also, from the village of Stirling I want to table a letter that I received, as did all other citizens of the community, about the lowering of the municipal sustainability initiative program by \$81,720 and the increase in education requisition of about \$130 to each homeowner. I'll table that.

Also, a letter from Rita Lyster of Rita's Apothecary & Home Healthcare Ltd., who just recently made an investment in her business and now feels like this state-of-the-art clinic is in jeopardy because of the changes.

I have the requisite number of copies and will give them to the page.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in his questions today and written by the Premier to seniors' advocate and former Calgary alderman John Schmal dated September 6, 2011, in which she promises to retain the current system of pharmacare for Alberta seniors. In the letter she goes further to state, "Elderly Albertans devoted their lives to building this province and income-based supports . . . are a poor repayment for their efforts." Seniors are outraged that the Premier is now ready to break this promise.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter written by the current Minister of Health to seniors' advocate and former Calgary alderman John Schmal dated March 19, 2012. In that letter the Health minister assures Mr. Schmal that he has been asked by the Premier to assure him that the government has no intent to make changes to seniors' drug coverage in Alberta. It took the Premier less than a year to break this promise to seniors, and they are outraged.

My third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is 50 more copies of some e-mail submissions that Albertans have sent to the Premier and copied me on. These are just some of the many hundreds of these e-mails my office has received. They call 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 tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of postcard submissions that Albertans made to our pre-budget tour, which visited seven cities in February. Anne,* Gloria, Clive, and Judith are some of the Albertans who provided input. For example, Anne from Sherwood Park would like to see the STEP summer employment program reinstated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from a constituent, Tyler Peterson. He has been involved with the U of A for the last 10 years as a student and now as an employee. He's very disturbed by the postsecondary education cuts and is experiencing them first-hand, but the point he wants to make is that this will have a significant impact on the professoriate and their research and that the research will be hampered one way or another. It will cost them more money to hire contract labour, or they won't be able to get the assistance. A good letter. Thank you very much.

The second tabling is on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition. I am tabling the document in which the quote that he used during question period is found in writing. I'm sorry I can't actually find it there, but he did quote a columnist from the *Calgary Herald*, and the quote is in here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, Enabling 21st Century Learning. It's their executive summary on what they do. You are aware that they have suffered approximately a 50 per cent cut in funding to those students who were using their programs, and 30,000 students around Alberta will be affected.

My second tabling is a letter from Dr. Chris Carter, who is concerned about the admissions process in regard to getting a residency here in Alberta. He is struggling to do so despite being eminently well qualified.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies in response to a letter from the Minister of Human Services regarding his comments about "willful misconceptions" in relation to child poverty and some of the concerns I have about his interpretation and delays in dealing with child poverty over this fractious debate about a definition of poverty.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Hughes, Minister of Energy, return to order of the Assembly for Motion for a Return MR 1, asked for by Mr. Hehr on March 18, 2013, copies of all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the period January 1, 2006, and February 20, 2011.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. That concludes our Routine today, with no points of order.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

Mandatory School Fees

Q34. Mr. McAllister:

What was the total amount that school boards in Alberta

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

charged in mandatory school fees in each of the school years from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, and how much did each individual board charge?

New School Construction Criteria

Q35. Mr. McAllister:

What are the criteria currently used by the Ministry of Education to determine where new schools are constructed?

3:00 Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 203

Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012.

This bill deals with an issue that is of great concern to families and employees alike in the province of Alberta and seeks to begin to change the attitudes and mindsets that surround this issue. Bill 203 proposes to amend the Employment Standards Code to include a provision that entitles employees up to an eight-week unpaid leave from work in order to provide compassionate care for family members in a palliative state.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada that does not include provisions for compassionate care leave in our employment law. As Albertans and as a government that has expressed our commitment to fostering strong families and communities and as a province that is seeing both a labour shortage and a dramatic demographic change, this fact should give us pause.

It is common practice in all other provinces to allow employees up to eight weeks of compassionate care leave. Quebec and Saskatchewan go further, at 12 weeks and 16 weeks respectively. The federal government's labour standards code allows compassionate caregivers to collect employment insurance benefits for up to six weeks. Elsewhere this insurance is collected in order to ease the financial strain that taking this leave entails; thus, employees in other provinces may collect supplemental income while carrying out their familial duties and transition back into the workplace afterwards. Mr. Speaker, employees in Alberta, while entitled to federal EI benefits, do not have the same assurance that their jobs will be waiting for them once the difficult responsibilities of compassionate caregiving are complete.

What Bill 203 proposes in detail, Mr. Speaker, is for an employee to be able to take leave from work for a combined total period of eight weeks in order to care for a terminally ill family member. In order to do so, the employee would have to obtain a medical certificate from his or her family member's medical provider certifying that the family member under question is at serious risk of death within 26 weeks and that that said family member requires the care and support of the individual who is to take the leave. Under Bill 203 the individual requesting leave would have to be a primary caregiver of the sick family member.

Mr. Speaker, the individual could take the eight weeks of leave consecutively or break up the leave into two periods of leave totalling no more than eight weeks as long as the second period ends no later than 26 weeks after the first period began. No period of leave could be less than one week in duration. Importantly,

upon returning to work, the employee could do so without any reduction in pay, salary, seniority, or benefits.

While this bill is meant to assist all working Albertans, it is addressed particularly to what may be termed our sandwich generation. This generation is composed of young parents tasked with raising children and often providing support for aging parents as well. It is becoming increasingly prominent within the province's demographic shift. Families in my constituency of Edmonton-South West have made it clear to me that there is widespread concern regarding the pressures of fulfilling these familial responsibilities while simultaneously earning a living to support these family dependants.

Now, it is true and ought to be recognized that there are employers here in Alberta that do provide some form of compassionate care leave in their benefit plans. While this practice is both admirable and commendable, it is not universal. An individual who happens to work for an employer that does not provide compassionate care leave is left with two options if a family member falls seriously ill. These two choices are to quit or to risk being severed from employment in order to care for a family member.

The individuals that comprise this sandwich generation are typically just establishing themselves in both their family and work lives. The loss of employment can be devastating for their own livelihoods and their capacity to provide effective care and support for their dependants. The unfortunate situation of having a family member in a palliative state does not affect only this individual and his or her caregiver, of course; the costs to an employer of losing an employee are substantial. In light of recent labour shortages and a myriad of unfilled job postings the impact of losing an employee from a business owner's perspective is considerable. For those employers that may not have considered offering compassionate care leave benefits, there is a risk of the unavoidable costs associated with losing existing employees. Subsequently, searching for training replacements will be incurred.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 seeks to recognize more clearly the scope of the impact of compassionate caregivers. This is why I'm committed to ensuring Bill 203 is as effective and comprehensive as it can be. Consultations have yielded responses from a diverse range of stakeholders from the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Alberta Caregivers Association, the Alberta Disabilities Forum, the Canadian Cancer Society, and policy researchers with expertise in the economics of compassionate caregiving. The discussions that I've had about compassionate care leave have only confirmed what my constituents in Edmonton-South West have asked me to do, specifically that access to job-protected compassionate care leave is advantageous to caregivers, to care recipients, to employers, and, most importantly, to our families.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity to make a significant change in our province right here today. We as a group of elected officials have a chance to positively impact future generations that want to and need to take time to care for their loved ones. I, like many others in this room today, want to give Albertans that choice, that option, to spend the final days with their loved ones. Through Bill 203 we can help these Albertans. We can make this a reality for those Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to this bill and speak in support of this bill. As someone who watched his wife die and chose to acquiesce to her wishes to die at home, it was very important to me to be able to be

there with her. Fortunately, I was self-employed, but an awful lot of my co-workers needed to step forward and fulfill my responsibilities and take care of things while I was there with her.

Being able to do this was a tremendous comfort to her and to our children, seven of whom were still living at home. We were able to give service to her. We were able to be there when she was in particular times of pain and need. We were able to do little favours for her, and it was particularly beneficial and a blessing for the children to be able to give back to their mother as they watched her die.

At one point prior to her passing she was unconscious because the doctors had put her into a twilight sleep so that the pain could be under control and she wouldn't have to be aware of it. They would come in after school and hold her hand and talk to her, and they'd take little foam swabs and touch them to her lips because she wasn't being fed. She didn't want to be on any machines to prolong her life because her condition was terminal, with no hope of having any quality of life if we intervened in any other way. So it was wonderful to have this opportunity.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I have great compassion for people who are in positions where they have loved ones that are near and dear to them. It's high time to have this government do this finally, I would say, since I think we are the last jurisdiction to do this in Canada, so that people who are in positions like I was in will be able to be there for their loved ones to provide compassionate care and to continue to demonstrate that love, which they I'm sure received in return during that person's lifetime, as I certainly did.

I'm certainly going to vote in favour of this, and I appreciate the member bringing it forward. I trust that everyone here will feel just as compassionately towards those that find themselves in this kind of circumstance.

I thank you for this opportunity. Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, brought forward by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. This bill is very important to me as it addresses a significant issue that unfortunately too many people have had to endure. This is long overdue.

Bill 203 is being brought forward in an effort to alleviate the financial and emotional strain on compassionate caregivers. By providing an employee with eight weeks of unpaid leave and the assurance of the same position and pay grade when they return, the government can provide a small amount of solace to help in a grave situation. This bill is aligned with the government's commitment to investing in Alberta's families and communities. It is indeed the right thing to do.

However, it would also serve to provide economic benefits to Alberta by reducing the number of jobs lost or turned down as a result of the obligations of being a caregiver. The obligation to provide care and support to ailing family members is often a heavy burden on families. Usually the first thing that comes to mind about the detriments of being a compassionate caregiver is the emotional impacts on the individual and their family. It is often difficult to look beyond these emotional struggles and consider the extensive economic consequences the situation can create.

A Statistics Canada study found that in 2002 there were approximately 1,784,000 informal caregivers aged 45 to 64. That is almost 2 million Canadians providing care to loved ones with long-term health problems over the age of 65.

3:10

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's translate that stat into an economic measure. That is 229,000 hours of work lost, which is approximately a 13.1 per cent reduction in the hours these people might have worked. Also, 293,000, or 16.8 per cent of these individuals, report changing their work patterns as a result of caregiving responsibilities, and 142,000 reported lost income, accounting for 8.1 per cent of the total number of caregivers. Now, these stats show the negative impacts on not only the individual but also the employer. When employees lose hours and change their work habits, employers lose productivity.

Many workplaces experience the upheavals of an employee's disruptive work schedule as they attempt to balance their duties at work and at home. If employees were assured they could take the time off as outlined in Bill 203 to fully commit to their home lives, then a smoother transition would take place at home and in the workplace.

Referring to the same study, Mr. Speaker, Stats Canada discovered that 47,000 job offers were turned down, and 27,000 resignations were handed in. I would just like to focus on the 27,000 positions that were left vacant and their effects on business. According to another report by StatsCan there are now more jobs than ever before the 2008 recession, which is leading to the number of vacancies increasing. As Albertans we know all too well our need to satisfy the labour needs of our growing economy.

Both small and large businesses are having difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified staff. As a result, companies are spending an increasing amount of time and money trying to fill vacancies and often settle for candidates who may not be suitable. For a company, no matter its size, to constantly hire new staff is not only disruptive for business but also drains resources, affecting the bottom line. It has also been said that it takes anywhere from three to six months for a new employee to become fully proficient at their job through mentoring, supports, and the follow-up.

It is the hope of Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, that by providing employees with the eight-week leave option, we can mitigate the issue of them vacating their current positions, therefore reducing the need for companies to find new permanent staff.

So far I've been speaking on the national level, so a few stats closer to home: of the 1,784,000 informal caregivers in 2002 308,000 were in the prairie provinces. It's also important to consider that the study I'm referencing only takes into account those caregivers between 45 and 64 and only those individuals over 65 receiving care. The actual number of informal caregivers is significantly higher if we include younger caregivers and family members. We are all too familiar with stories we all hear in our constituencies, including mine.

This bill will have a positive economic impact by simply supporting Albertans in their time of need. While I'm on the topic of economic impact I must also consider the detriments to the employers, specifically small business. A large company may be able to make do by spreading out the work of one employee over eight weeks instead of investing in the costs of hiring a temporary replacement; therefore, the work cycle is not impacted in a substantial way.

However, Mr. Speaker, when there are small teams, the loss of one employee for eight weeks may prove to be a monumental burden. I would question if the cost savings of not having to replace the absent employee would outweigh the costs the

employer would have to cover in his absence. When a team member is missing, the remainder of the team may find themselves working extra hours, meaning the employer may also have to pay overtime.

Mr. Speaker, monetary costs are not the only costs associated with this situation. When an added workload places strain on a team, morale can worsen, which affects productivity. We have to ask ourselves: is retaining an employee worth the added cost to business, especially those that may not be able to sustain the change?

As I stated before, this government is committed to investing in our families and communities, and we're always looking for new and innovative ways to do just that. I would once again like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill forward – I'm proud to be your colleague – and also congratulate him for his first private member's bill. It's an initiative I feel is important to discuss in this House as it has the potential to make an impact on Albertans' lives. Bill 203 is absolutely necessary because it is about respect for families and employers, and it strikes the right balance.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, something that is definitely long overdue. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this forward, and I appreciate the initiative in this matter.

Alberta is the last province to adopt compassionate care leave legislation. Our friends and neighbours, including Manitoba, Ontario, and B.C., have all recognized the value and compassion that personal care providers bring to the table.

The Service Canada employment insurance compassionate care benefits publication recognizes that compassionate care leave is a necessity for Canada as a whole. It states:

One of the most difficult times for anyone is when a loved one is dying or at risk of death. The demands of caring for a gravely ill family member can jeopardize both your job and the financial security of your family. The Government of Canada believes that, during such times, you should not have to choose between keeping your job and caring for your family.

I'm encouraged that the Member for Edmonton-South West has brought this bill forward as I believe that we should be in step with the government of Canada and ensure that all Albertans have the same abilities.

The Health Council of Canada states, "when Canadians are struggling to cope with the illness of a loved one, they want the comfort of knowing they can be there to provide care without paying a heavy personal financial penalty."

Currently in the Alberta Employment Standards Code there's limited allowance for authorized leave. It only applies to maternal, parental, and those in the military reserve. All of these forms of leave are necessary, but there is no allowance for compassionate leave in the case of someone wanting to look after a family member that will most likely die in the near future.

This is similar to what the Wildrose campaigned on in the last election under our kinship palliative care policy. In that policy the Wildrose proposed that the government adopt legislation where family members who might otherwise be employed in the workforce are compensated for providing end-of-life care for their loved ones. In addition to that, the Wildrose called for the government to reduce the complexity and regulatory barriers to families,

nonprofit organizations, charities, and businesses who wish to establish safe and affordable facilities providing assisted living, long-term care, and palliative care. I understand that Bill 203 doesn't go nearly as far as our proposal did, but I also understand that the limitations are there for what private members can actually do.

There have been many reports and discussions regarding the effects of end-of-life care. A study of end-of-life care and the effects of bereavement on family caregivers of persons with dementia found that although family caregiving has been intensively studied in the past decade, little attention has been paid to the impact of end-of-life care on caregivers, who are often family members of persons with dementia, or to the caregivers' responses to the death of the patient. I would suggest that it is no different for any end-of-life care.

In this study it goes on to say that half of the caregivers reported spending at least 46 hours per week assisting patients with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living. More than half the caregivers reported that they felt they were on duty 24 hours a day, that the patient had frequent pain, and that they had to end or reduce employment owing to the demands of caregiving. Caregivers exhibited high levels of depressive symptoms while providing care to the relative with dementia, but they showed remarkable resilience after the death. Within three months of the death caregivers had clinically significant declines in the level of depressive symptoms, and within one year the levels of symptoms were substantially lower than levels reported when they were acting as the caregiver. Seventy-two per cent of caregivers reported that the death was a relief to them, and more than 90 per cent reported belief that it was a relief to the patient.

The conclusion of that study also found that end-of-life care for patients with dementia was extremely demanding on family caregivers, intervention and support services were needed most before the patient's death when death was preceded by a protracted and stressful period of caregiving, and caregivers reported considerable relief at the death itself.

Clearly, there are many factors that affect those that look after their loved ones in the end of life. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, my own family has experienced this first-hand, as many Albertans do each day. As most are aware, my brother Ron was diagnosed with Huntington's in July 2008. As I've said before many times in this House, this came as a complete shock to our family. Huntington's is a deadly disease where there's no treatment, no cure.

Our neurologist gave my brother Ron two years to live, and my mom and dad and our family were devastated. Once the initial shock wore off, we certainly did our part to ensure he was able to be cared for appropriately. Sadly, his disease was so far progressed that we were not able to keep him at home, and he was cared for in a long-term care facility. I can assure you, though, that the demands on caregivers even in a long-term care facility are still great.

Mr. Speaker, my mom is a saint. I cannot do what she did for us and for my brother. I can tell you that from my own personal standpoint I just don't have the fortitude to be my mom. Her average day consisted of going to the long-term care facility every morning before she went to her full-time job. She would arrive there. She would wake my brother up. First of all, she'd give him a big hug. She would make sure that he had his drinks for the day. She would make sure he had his nutrition. She would feed him, she would wipe him, and she would do whatever she needed to do before she started her long day.

3:20

Mom would then come back to the facility every day and night, including weekends. She spent every waking moment with my 32-

year-old brother until his death at 35. She would feed Ron. She would feed him his meals, she would feed him his snacks, she would help him with his Pepsi, and she would even light his cigarettes for him. She would wheel him around so that he could get some fresh air. She would laugh with him, and she would talk with him for hours. She cried with him, she shared with him, and she loved him.

She went on. She dressed him, she bathed him, she combed his hair, and she brushed his teeth. These were all things that front-line staff couldn't or weren't able to find the time to do just because of natural reasons. Yes, I know that many parents do this; however, not many parents are doing it believing that tomorrow their son, their daughter, or their loved one will die.

I shared in some of those responsibilities for my brother, and while I couldn't do them nearly as well as she, I can tell you that the demands even on my own family were great. I can also tell you that at the time my six-year-old daughter and my 18-year-old daughter would visit Ron every single day as well, and they would share some of those responsibilities to give my mom a break. Even though they were there, my mom still felt a need to be there every single day to love her son like every parent does.

Like many Albertans who provide end-of-life care, my mom would have liked to have been able to be with her son full-time in that last six months. Bill 203, compassionate care leave, would have allowed her to do that.

Mr. Speaker, much like the Wildrose kinship care program, Bill 203 would have an additional benefit. You see, there is a process for those who care for loved ones who are dying. As with any death there are many stages of grief, and allowing that person to be with them if they're able allows them to go through each stage with their loved one rather than feeling alone or out of control or pressured that their employment would not be there when they returned.

That being said, I believe that many Alberta employers are very good about ensuring that they show compassion in these circumstances, and I can tell you that my mom's employer was one of such employers. Alberta employers value the people working for them and do their best to accommodate employees in difficult situations.

I support Bill 203, the compassionate care act, Mr. Speaker. This will provide some respite to those required to take leave and those who wish to take care of dying family members like a child, a spouse, or a parent. As many members in this House know, today our own caucus is dealing with one such situation. This is a leave, not a paid leave, so it will not pass on additional cost to independent businesses or government. If Bill 203 passes, people won't have to choose between losing a job and neglecting a loved one in need. Bill 203, like the Wildrose kinship care program, helps the growing number of people who must care for their own children and their aging parents while at the same time working, the sandwich generation, as we affectionately call them.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, reducing stress for people who are already vulnerable is good not only for the family but also for society in reduced medical costs and lost working time down the road. The worker already has emotional stress. This legislation reduces some of the financial stress they also might have.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a long overdue bill, and I'm happy to support it. I encourage all members of the House to pass Bill 203, the compassionate care act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill forward. Bill 203 intends to alleviate the financial and emotional strain on individuals acting as informal caregivers for seriously ill family members by amending the Employment Standards Code to ensure up to eight weeks of unpaid leave from work with no risk of loss of employment and no reduction in pay or seniority upon returning to work.

To provide care and support to ill and aging family members is an unwritten obligation in our society. In some cases this can be extremely taxing for families. Family members who fill the role of an informal caregiver often must turn down or lose jobs as a result of the responsibility associated with caregiving. Ensuring that children are fed, clothed, sheltered, and happy as a part of caring for a family can be a handful in itself. Concerns about job security are the last things that young families should be worried about, especially if family members find themselves as an informal caregiver for a relative or even a child. Mr. Speaker, this act may help young and new families in Alberta.

As we have stated in this Chamber many times, a priority under the leadership of the hon. Premier is to invest in all Alberta families. Albertans know that strong families are the heart of our prosperous province. Our government will continue to implement initiatives that support the strengthening of families, and amending the code would allow for adults and young families to have assurance in their employment position if ever they are required to take time away from the work environment to care for a sick loved one, child, family member, or even a spouse's family members.

Giving employees the time they need to act as caregivers in their families when there's a terminal illness may encourage economic stability in the family. For example, if a young child were to become terminally ill, this act may give the parents the freedom to take compassionate caregiver leave, which may help to maintain domestic stability in the household. This act may support young families who have elderly and aging parents so they, too, can have the opportunity to act as caregivers. Sometimes elderly parents are moved into the care of costly nursing homes. Compassionate care leave offers an alternative for young families beginning to establish themselves and gain stable economic footings.

Although this bill would provide the option to employees to take a leave to care for their ailing loved ones, not all employees may choose to take advantage of this. This could incur guilt and judgment among workers who choose to put their loved ones in professional care instead of taking compassionate care leave. The code currently provides unpaid self-protected maternity, parental, and military reservist job leave. However, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is one of the only provinces that does not have a standard for compassionate care leave enshrined in its code. Given our government's commitment to investing in all Alberta families, implementing this act could protect employment for families and may bring us up to par with other provinces like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Furthermore, fostering domestic stability is crucial in informal caregiving roles, which can be maintained through a reliable caregiver presence.

In 2004 a Health Canada survey revealed that 84 per cent of caregivers were providing care to a family member, friend, or neighbour diagnosed with mental illness. At times when mental illness is involved, it may be important to maintain a consistent, familiar caregiver presence. This stable presence helps their family member to be better equipped to deal with their illnesses.

Another facet of informal caregiving is the identity of a young caregiver. This includes family members under the age of 25 who are forced to care for their sick parent, sibling, or grandparent. Young caregivers who are thrust into otherwise unexpected positions face trading normal adolescent experience and development for the ceaseless and exhausting demands of caregiving. Caregiving can be demanding, emotionally draining, and time consuming. In addition, a young caregiver may be expected to balance these expectations while facing the risk of not finishing school or acquiring skills, knowledge, and experience that will afford them future success in life. On the other hand, there are numerous supports in place to counsel young teens through the stress of adolescence, including their roles as caregivers.

A recent survey of high school students in Vancouver classrooms found that 12 per cent of surveyed youth are in caregiving roles. This survey also painted a picture of the family dynamics of participants, where fewer young caregivers than noncaregivers reported living with both parents, 57 per cent versus 71 per cent. More young caregivers reported living with their mothers most of the time, 19 per cent versus 14 per cent. In 40 per cent of the cases parents were the recipients of primary care. Another 36 per cent of young caregivers were caring for their grandparents. Finally, 7 per cent were caring for an aunt or an uncle, 16 per cent for another member.

Because working parents and young families may not be supported by employers to take compassionate care leave, young family members assume the position of caregiving. Mr. Speaker, youth may not be equipped or trained with the life or practical skills to assume the role of caregiver for family members with extensive chronic conditions. Young caregivers prematurely assume adult responsibilities.

3:30

On the other hand, this bill could assume that family members who choose to take compassionate care leave are experienced in giving care. Those loved ones who need care often suffer from complex and life-threatening conditions that require expertise. Encouraging compassionate care leave instead of professional care by trained individuals could be dangerous for ailing family members. As a result, there are numerous effects on both families and individuals, with shifts in caring responsibilities and expectations.

I would like to thank again the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill forward as it allows this Assembly to consider the effects that employment legislation has on Albertans, especially the young and new families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to get up to speak to this bill. I, too, would like to join with the other members and thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing forward this bill. It is an important bill. It's long, long overdue. Really, there is no question that we will support the bill. I don't think, frankly, that either in this province or federally we have anywhere near the support in place that's actually required to deal with the growing challenges that Canadian and Albertan families face when it comes to dealing with the illness of their loved ones and the slowly decreasing opportunities for care through the public sector. Of course, we've had a great deal of discussion about that here in this Legislature as it relates to long-term care.

There is no question that a starting point, of course, is for us to bring ourselves up to the level that the rest of the country is operating at, and I guess that's one point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker. The ability of Albertans to gain access to those benefits through the Employment Insurance Act actually occurred or was introduced in 2005. For eight years Albertans have basically been significantly limited in their ability to access these benefits because this government has been unprepared to ever ask Alberta employers to do anything. When it came down to saying, "You know what? You need to guarantee people the right to return to their job," this government simply did not have the best interests of the greatest number of Albertans in their mind. As a result, we spent eight years not having legislation that was required to ensure that our citizens could get access to a program into which they contribute as active working people.

It really is quite shameful, Mr. Speaker, that this matter has to come forward as a private member's bill, but I give nothing but the greatest of accolades to the member for bringing it forward. I really think it's important for members on the government side to support this bill and then, when you go into your caucus meeting, to push the minister to actually move forward with it. I'm a little concerned that this bill is not coming forward as a government bill. Now, in media reports around why it's coming forward as a private member's bill rather than a government member's bill, there was one article. By all means, it may have not entirely quoted the member correctly. Nonetheless, it suggested that, well, there wasn't quite room for this bill on the government's legislative agenda, so as a result this member chose to approach bringing this bill through a private member's strategy.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if I could just sort of go through, since I was elected in 2008, the government passed 53 bills in 2008, passed 62 bills in 2009. In 2011, a little bit of a bumpy year for those folks, a bit of a leadership thing going on at that time, they were down to 27, and in 2012 I believe that collectively between pre- and postelection we were able to pass 16. Now we're at about 12 so far introduced this year. I'm not quite sure why it is that there isn't room on the government's legislative agenda for this bill to be a government bill so that we would know that if it was passed, it would actually be implemented. Of course, as all members in this House understand, a private member's bill, even if passed, does not compel the government to act on it.

Of course, we have seen that with respect to the bill banning provincial achievement tests for grade 3. [interjection] Okay. There it was a motion. We've seen this government essentially ignore a motion. As you know, as the House leader reminds me, it was just a motion. They chose to ignore a motion passed by the majority of members in this House, but of course we also know that they have the authority or the ability to ignore a private member's bill passed by the majority of members in this House.

It should actually be a government bill because, to review, our employment insurance contributions have been going towards paying for the ability of families who are struck with the tragedy of having to care for a loved one to access those benefits we've been paying for since 2004. This government has not guaranteed the rights of Albertans to access the benefits for which they've been paying since 2004, and there is no excuse for it, Mr. Speaker, none at all.

Now, in terms of the bill itself, as I said, we will support it. I think that when we get to committee – hopefully, we will get to committee at some point – we may actually be putting forward a few amendments. One that I hope all members, including the sponsor of the bill, will consider, which is quite technical, is just defining when it is that the right to ensure that your job is protected for you commences. That right should not commence

when you started the leave. Rather, that right should commence when you give notice that you're going to need the leave so that there's not a window there where there's an ability for your employer to terminate your employment. That's kind of an important thing.

Generally speaking, one of the things as well is that because Canadians across the country have actually had access to this benefit for eight years, the one upside of this government being so slow and unwilling to stand up for families who are suffering from the terminal illness of a loved one is, I suppose, if you can find one at all, that we have the benefit of looking back at what's worked with that program since it was introduced in 2004.

We know that there are issues around whether or not people should be able to share that compassionate care leave and also issues around whether or not you can maintain partial employment, so go down to part-time rather than completely leave the employment. Of course, as we all know, all that happens when you take that compassionate care leave is that you get employment insurance, which I believe is about \$1,300, \$1,400 a month right now. For most people that in and of itself is quite a tremendous loss to their income. They're still taking quite a major financial hit even when they're accessing those benefits. Sometimes people want to be able to try and do part-time. People who've observed the effectiveness of the compassionate care program have recommended that that ought to be something which should be considered.

Going forward, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member's bill highlights a larger issue that we need to deal with not only in this Legislature but in Legislatures across the country. What I refer to when I say that is this whole issue of the fact that we have an aging population, that we have in most jurisdictions and certainly in this jurisdiction reductions in home-care services, that we have a planned increase in cost to pharmaceutical services. Most studies show, actually, that when those kinds of programs are implemented, we see an increase in illness and an increase in acute illness. Then, of course, we have a government which has embarked upon a process of not building new long-term care, and then we've got sort of this continuing care, where the standards are quite varied.

So what happens is that, in short, a huge and growing burden shifts to families to care for their chronically ill family members. That happens whether that person is terminally ill or whether they have a chronic illness that requires daily care and may well require daily care for 20 more years. Through a variety of decisions that this government has made, a very significant burden is being shifted to Alberta families and to Alberta caregivers. I'm sure many members of this House on all sides have met with advocates from caregiver associations who talk about the reality of having to deal with a chronically ill loved one while also juggling the need to pay their rent and keep a roof over their head and feed their family.

3:40

We know that there are significant challenges and that those challenges grow every day, and at this point the government is actually hastening the growth of those challenges and indeed exaggerating them through some of the policies that they've been pursuing quite aggressively and intentionally over the last four or five years. These issues are not going to go away.

Now, that being said, this particular act is one which is limited in a very narrow way to people who are terminally ill, and this simply ensures that people who attempt to care for their terminally ill family members are able to maintain their job. As I say, it is truly unfortunate that this is having to come as a private member's

bill, that the government hasn't done it as a government bill, but I urge all to vote in favour of it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for putting forward this very good bill, Bill 203, Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. If you look at the broader social construct in which we live, I think this bill goes some way to address a problem that exists here in Alberta, but as the member before stated, these problems are oncoming and forthcoming and will be ever present in our daily lives here in Alberta over the course of the next 20, 30, 40 years.

Simply put, we have an aging population that will tend to need a large amount of care both through our medical system, our long-term care system, and otherwise, and both legislation as well as government policy are going to have to reflect that reality. We can go through a whole look at the way we have done things over the last 50, 60 years that has based our society on many of the baby boomers working and being active in their community, moving into older age, and hopefully living in older age a reasonable existence in a compassionate, caring community.

This bill actually does a little bit in not only helping a certain situation, particularly when a person has a terminal illness and someone wishes to get compassionate leave from their employer to take care of the family member who is terminally ill, but the bill also highlights this growing concern that is going to happen throughout the rest of our society.

The member's bill is very good legislation. It really only makes sense that a person who wishes to care for a loved one who is terminally ill should be able to take a leave from his or her employment to do the decent thing and assist their family member. It only makes common sense.

I was somewhat surprised when the hon. member before me spoke and indicated that this was well in place in other provinces and that we are well behind the curve here in Alberta on issues like this. I guess I should have intuitively known that, but I'm glad that the hon. member put more of a fine point on that and did an excellent job of showing that other provinces have seemingly reacted to this undeniable situation of what is happening in our societies and how we can best do it in a compassionate and caring manner that reflects not only what people's needs are but what is basic human decency.

On that note, I too am surprised that it's not a government motion. It would have been timely to that effect and simply would delay the ongoing wranglings behind the scenes of getting a private member's bill put into law. As we all know, sometimes these things pass, and then they never see the light of day again until someone drags these bills up about 10 years later and says: "Oh, my goodness. We didn't pass this." My hope is that that won't happen in this case and that we'll go forward on that basis.

If we return to my initial point, this is good legislation. I applaud the member for making this bill here, and my hope is that everyone in this Assembly will support it. If we could remember that our society is going to have to deal with these situations in a continual and ongoing manner – the cost of an aging society both medically and with the loss of them in the workplace and for human decency's sake, in my view, indicates that government expenditures in social spending and health care will inevitably rise over the coming years. It's an inescapable truth that unless we want to see people on the streets or not getting the medical care

they need or the like, governments are going to be actively involved in an aging society.

I think that's something that governments all across Canada and our federal government as well as this government are failing to recognize. It's going to take our recognition as a society that contributions to the public purse to see that people age in a decent fashion are made and that it's reasonable for the government to have a role in supporting people as they age. But that debate will continue to happen, and we'll go from there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

A correction. I'll recognize the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was kind of wondering what had happened there.

This may seem frivolous, Mr. Speaker, but it is with great respect that I rise to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, something that's long overdue. Alberta is the last province to adopt this compassionate care leave legislation. Currently in the Employment Standards Code there is limited allowance only for authorized leave. It only applies to maternal, parental, and those who are in the military reserve. All these forms of leave are necessary, but there is no allowance for compassionate leave in the case of someone wanting to look after a family member that most likely will die in the near term. Bill 203 doesn't go as far as the Wildrose policy did, but I do understand that there are limits to what a private member's bill can or would do.

To relate from my respect, Mr. Speaker, in the spring of 1985, as my father's time on this Earth approached its end as a result of colorectal cancer, our family farm aircraft was making a daily commute of some one hour and 10 minutes each way to the city of Saskatoon so our family could effect his proper care at the end of his time. It was only through our financial attributes and the family commitment at that time that we were able to provide him with his care. It was quite a traumatic time for our family, and I still remember those days.

I will be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, and I believe this legislation will do a good thing in providing leave for those who wish to take care of dying family members like a child, a spouse, or a parent. This is a leave, not a paid leave, so it will not pass on additional costs to independent businesses or the government. If this bill passes, people won't have to choose between losing a job and neglecting a loved one in need. This bill helps the growing number of people who must care for their own children and their aging parents at the same time. Reducing stress for people who are already vulnerable is good not only for the family but also for society in reducing medical costs and lost working time down the road. The worker already has emotional stress, and this legislation reduces some of the financial stress they may have.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a long overdue bill, and I am glad the member brought it forward.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, forward. The objective of this bill, I think, is something that we can all agree with. Wanting to care for a seriously ill

family member in their time of need is something, I believe, that we all share in this House.

We all know the difficulties that families face when confronted with the challenges of caring for relatives who are not well. People who provide care to their family members are not just caring for their loved ones; they're also providing a valuable service to society through their love and compassion. These caregivers deserve society's care and understanding in a trying time, Mr. Speaker. That's why I'm glad the hon. member has put forward Bill 203 so that we may discuss this topic in the House.

Bill 203 would provide for eight weeks of unpaid leave for caregivers of a family member who has a serious medical condition and is at risk of death within the subsequent 26 weeks. It's important to have a clear understanding of what this unpaid leave would mean to a caregiver. It would mean being able to take up to eight weeks of unpaid leave from work with no risk of loss of employment. It would mean no reduction in pay or seniority upon returning to work. It would offer more flexibility to workers who as of today may not be seeking employment due to commitments to caring for loved ones. On the other hand, the bill would attempt to apply a one-size-fits-all solution to a complex situation, which may not work across all sectors of the economy. This bill would increase the flexibility for employees but have the opposite effect for employers. Therefore, we also need to weigh all potential viewpoints on the issue.

Societies are often judged by their empathy for the common man or woman, and this bill would enable society to better accommodate the decisions of caregivers both now and in the future. Enabling all who work in our society to choose whether or not to take a leave from work in order to care for a seriously ill loved one could improve the efficiency of our economy. The end result would be economic benefit and a society which better cares for its people. These benefits, in my mind, form a virtuous circle.

Other changes proposed include setting a minimum standard for this type of leave, ensuring a common process for requesting and granting leave across workplaces. Setting that standard would make it easier for caregivers to navigate a course of action when seeking compassionate care leave, making life just a bit easier for them during a time of great strain in their family life. A universal process would ensure that the granting of leave is not arbitrary according to an individual employer's policy. Mr. Speaker, two individuals working for different employers would be assured under this bill of a standard response to similar applications for compassionate care leave.

Mindful of this amendment's possible benefits to the Employment Standards Code, as proposed by the hon. member, it's important to ensure that minimum standards do not cause more overall harm than good to society by discouraging employers from hiring additional workers. Eight weeks of leave to care for a seriously ill family member might set the right balance between employees' commitments made to employers and the realistic challenges facing employers.

As a small-business owner and employer myself – I'm also the past president of the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce – I anticipate there will be some concerns that will arise from this at the onset, but most will likely overcome that. I don't believe that the standard would be overly onerous for most employers today. Many already provide these opportunities. Many, including myself, have provided paid leave in situations like that to assist their employees, but that's not possible for all employers.

We have the lowest unemployment in Canada, and employee retention is certainly an issue. It is a benefit to employers to maintain that expertise which comes back to their businesses. It provides that certainty. It provides a certainty for both the

employer and the employee that that job will still be there and that the employer will benefit from having that expertise back in their business.

Bill 203 would grant people who may have to care for a seriously ill family member future security. It would enable people to know that there will be a standard set in the event they need to care for a seriously ill family member, removing a perceived barrier for some to seek employment, no matter where one sought to work. It would enable the seriously ill individual to know without a doubt that the family member taking compassionate leave to care for them is not endangering their future economic situation through loss of employment. Mr. Speaker, that's what this bill is all about, making the lives of the seriously ill and their caregivers just a little bit easier in their time of need.

Creating a compassionate leave standard as described in Bill 203 is exactly the type of policy we were elected by our constituents to make. I believe it's important to make these types of decisions with our eyes open both to the consequences of our actions and the benefits. We must consider the points of view from other members and the perspectives of all of our constituents, including business owners, before making changes to the standard employment relationship.

That being said, I'm mindful that individuals and even companies acting alone cannot create a system like the one proposed. Sometimes only government can ensure that society's values are put into action across our entire economy and are not subject to the whims of individual employers over time. This certainty is why I believe the bill would be a significant addition to our system of supports for seriously and terminally ill individuals and their family caregivers. Only government can put into action minimum standards that we all wish to enjoy. Only government can act to protect the most vulnerable when individual values of the employers conflict with society's values. We've seen this over time with the development of labour standards, including legislating minimum wage, overtime laws, and other interventions into what's seen as the private domain of business.

Mr. Speaker, it is my belief that we are all stronger together, that while individual actions and spirits form the core of our society, it is the collective decisions our society makes through our representatives here in the Assembly where we express our values and ensure no one is subject to the whims of other individuals that violate our collective values. This expression of our values is what we owe to our caregivers and the seriously ill people that they care for. Empathy alone, when it is within our power to take real action with little negative consequence, is a betrayal of our values. It is our job while living out collective values to ensure that our methods of achieving an objective impairs others' rights and values as little as possible.

Although some may view this approach of evaluation as overly cautious, I believe the benefits of this approach are readily apparent. Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this bill to terminally ill individuals and their caregivers is plain to see. This bill would enable those who wish to provide personal care to their relatives in their last days with the freedom to do so. The impact of a family face and a loved one's compassion cannot be underestimated. The increase in quality of life is immeasurable.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank everyone who participated in this bill today, and I would like to again thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward, his first private member's bill in the Assembly. I have enjoyed hearing other members' points of view on this matter, and I urge all hon. members to consider both the benefits and consequences of what is proposed in this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would echo many of the comments of our colleagues here today in congratulating the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill forward. It is refreshing, I believe we could all agree, when you have bipartisan, seemingly all-party support for a piece of legislation, private member's bill or not. So well done.

It would be nice to see, though, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona noted earlier, a bill of this nature being brought forward as a government bill so it wouldn't be, I guess, held up by the process or lack thereof sometimes of private members' business. I think that Bill 207 could probably be looked at through a similar lens, but that's a discussion for another day.

You know, it's quite encouraging to see when we put forward pieces of legislation in this House that do really have the opportunity to make a positive impact in people's lives, and I do believe that that's what the intent of Bill 203 is and what it will actually do.

4:00

Previously the choice that was afforded to many people who had a loved one at home – a parent, a spouse, a sibling, whatever the case may be – that required long-term support in their palliative care time was a difficult choice that employers were sometimes asking their employees to make. Were they going to keep their job, or were they going to care for the person or the loved one that they, you know, obviously so desperately wanted to and needed to? I've never had the need to be in that situation, Mr. Speaker, but I couldn't imagine the guilt that some must have felt to have known that they needed to choose to stay at work as opposed to being at home and caring for that loved one who so desperately needed them at that time. It's not a decision that I think anyone would take lightly.

I'm very pleased to see that this bill has been put forward. I guess, as the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill can attest to, that just because you have private members' business and you're a government member, it doesn't mean it's going anywhere, but I truly do hope and believe that this bill will.

You know, this bill does help, as we've said before, that sandwich generation, those who are having children who are being brought up in school. They're having to raise those kids and at the same time care for aging parents. It's very much the right thing to do, and it's encouraging.

As has been said as well, many employers would probably allow for this sort of compassionate leave with or without the legislation, Mr. Speaker. You know, I would like to think that most employers would do that. It was encouraging to hear the speech from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo suggesting that even as a small-business owner himself he compensated those who required it. That takes that compassion up to another level. As he suggested, there are employers who would refuse to do that or may not have the option or opportunity to do it. It is nice to see that the employment code will be amended to allow for this type of leave and this type of situation.

Obviously, there are some consequences to legislation of this nature, and it would be, I guess, unwise of me not to at least just reflect on perhaps one unintended consequence. If you were a small-business owner and you had two or three employees and you had to lose one for compassionate care – and I'm sure that these individuals who are running these businesses would wilfully do this in the first place – it may put them in a tough position when they have no choice but to let this person go. It's a tough

timeline, eight weeks. It's difficult to find someone and have to hire someone to fill that need.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that this House should not pass this legislation. I look forward to seeing the amendments that the members in the other parties will be bringing forward, and I hope that we are able to strengthen this bill so that, you know, employees are definitely protected as they go through this process, which can be described only as probably a very stressful and not very fun time.

Alberta is the last province to adopt this protection. It is a good move, and I look forward, as do my colleagues, I'm sure, to helping the Member for Edmonton-South West pass this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. I would like to thank the hon. member for his efforts on this bill, and I would like to extend my congratulations to this hon. member for his first bill tabled in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 aims to amend the Employment Standards Code. It seeks to alleviate the financial and emotional stress on individuals who are acting as informal caregivers for seriously ill family members by guaranteeing eight weeks of unpaid leave from work with no risk of loss of employment and no reduction in pay or seniority. This bill aims to serve Alberta's workers in extreme family situations.

Within the framework of what this bill proposes, an employee would have to present his or her employer with a signed medical certificate indicating that a family member is at serious risk of death within the subsequent 26 weeks. Following the leave period the employee would return to work at the same rate of pay and seniority as he or she previously held before the leave was taken.

Other provinces in Canada currently have legislation regarding compassionate care leave, Mr. Speaker. If this bill were to be passed, Alberta would join other provinces that have introduced similar legislation.

Mr. Speaker, this bill pertains to a question that is of concern to the province of Alberta, the question of how best to serve the families that call Alberta home. As I am sure we will all agree, families comprise a cornerstone of health and vibrancy of our culture and our communities. It is the family that is the core of any community. Within the family children undergo the formative growth that will prepare them for their education and ultimately their careers, within which they will hopefully establish their own families. Families provide love and support to their members. The morale that the family unit instills in individuals allows them to be active and contributing members of society. As a result, the family unit is a key driver in Alberta's economic prosperity as well as our social cohesion.

The intent of Bill 203 is to aid families that have been affected by the tragedy of a terminally ill member. Alberta businesses recognize the importance of the family as an institution vital to their own success as well. Mr. Speaker, it is because of strong and stable families that we are in the prosperous position in which we currently find ourselves. In turn, businesses have the same families to thank for their own profitability. This is why a number of businesses and employers across the province have built provisions for compassionate care leave into their own employee

benefits programs. Business owners know that an unstable family life makes for a troubled and unproductive employee.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the economic success of this province we have been and will continue to be able to attract, invest in, and strengthen business viability. It is our unique prosperity, matched nowhere else, I might add, that has therefore allowed Albertan companies to be among the best to work in in the whole world. This is why employers in our province have helped us to ensure that our families receive the financial stability that they require in order to provide love and security to the member.

Bill 203 recognizes that employers are not legally required to grant leave to employees undertaking the responsibility of the compassionate caregiver. Bill 203 seeks to change that, Mr. Speaker. It aims to provide a clear guideline for employees and employers who are in this situation. Fortunately, we can rest assured that despite there not being any legislation to this effect, the incentives to promote a high quality of life for employees has prompted businesses to protect their workers to this effect. This government works hard to foster excellent economic and social opportunities for its families, and it will always continue to do so as we would like every Albertan to be able to enjoy the prosperity and the good fortune our province offers. The spirit of Bill 203 recognizes this.

At the same time, our government recognizes that there will always be the opportunity to improve standards of living for workers and that there will be a variety of means by which such improvements may be enacted. We focus on areas such as access to services, protection of personal property, and, most importantly, families, health, and well-being. This government is working very hard to improve primary health care.

Mr. Speaker, we also have our Employment Standards Code legislation, which allows workers to take leave for reasons pertaining to maternal and paternal responsibilities. Our province also offers great health care services for individuals suffering from terminal illness. But when loved ones get sick, family members may choose to become their caregiver. A number of individuals and families feel that this is the best way to take care of somebody who is terminally ill. When people are charged with the task of having to care for an ill family member, the health of the family member should take precedence over financial burdens.

4:10

The need for dedicated family caregivers is recognized by all Albertans, by workers and employers alike. It is this like-mindedness that has contributed to the decision of so many business owners to care for their employees by undertaking the importance of familial obligations. We all recognize that it is extremely stressful for everyone involved when a family member becomes seriously ill. Families will endure more stress if the person acting as an informal caregiver is at risk of losing their job.

Mr. Speaker, currently there are thousands of informal caregivers in Alberta, and that they are able to function as caregivers is a testament to the dedication of this province and our business owners to support the family unit. Nonetheless, it could well be the case that some informal caregivers have to give up employment in order to fulfill their obligations. Bill 203 could potentially curb job loss by guaranteeing the worker leave to take care of an ill family member by universalizing the obligation to grant leave.

Of course, job retention is vital to Alberta's economic concerns, just as it is to concerns of families for stable and secure home lives. We can be thankful, Mr. Speaker, that employee loyalty remains high in this province and that our families can reliably expect the security of their household incomes.

I appreciate the hon. member's recognition of families as the building blocks of this province, and the sponsor of Bill 203 has allowed us to highlight the importance of families and all advantages that this province holds out to them. Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for tabling this bill and for the discussion it has generated in this House. I look forward to hearing what my other colleagues have to contribute to the remaining debate on this particular bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Stony Plain.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 203, proposed by the Member for Edmonton-South West. I applaud my colleague opposite for raising the issue of compassionate care and bringing this legislation forward for debate.

Our province is the only one in Canada that has not legislated the right for citizens to access compassionate care leave from their employer, and it is time we looked at doing so, in fact probably long past time. The unfortunate reality is that there are and will continue to be Albertans who have a family member, whether it be a spouse, a child, or a parent, who is gravely ill and who needs care in their last moments. I certainly would not wish this circumstance upon anyone. When instances like these arise, a person shouldn't have to choose between their career and their family member. They should not have to choose between caring for their loved one and keeping a job.

I will be supporting this legislation because it will expand the ability of an Albertan to take leave from their employment. If this legislation passes, Albertans will not only be authorized to take parental leave or a leave for military service but will also be authorized to take compassionate care leave. This legislation would protect the jobs of those on leave so that people won't have to choose between losing a job and neglecting a loved one in need.

The measures around compassionate care as proposed in this legislation seem to me to strike a good balance. For example, the leave must be certified by a physician. This makes sense and will help ensure the system is not abused. Another balance measure is the requirement for an employee to have worked at least 52 consecutive weeks for the same employer in order to be eligible to take a compassionate care leave. Since the legislation will protect an employee's job and make it available upon their return from leave, it is an appropriate requirement for that employee to have spent a significant amount of time in that position. Because the proposed compassionate care leave is exactly that, a leave, it is not a paid absence, so there will be no additional cost to businesses or the taxpayer when an employee goes on leave.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleagues, especially those sitting on the government benches, to consider the Wildrose proposal of developing a palliative care program that would provide employment insurance type supplemental coverage for Albertans who are ineligible for federal EI while caring for a loved one needing home care. I sincerely hope that the government will consider this. Even if Bill 203 passes and Albertans have in theory access to compassionate care leave, there are still many Albertans who in practice will be in the position of choosing between a paycheck and the last days of a loved one's life.

While we are considering the legislation that is before us, we should also be thinking about the Albertans who may not be eligible for federal EI and who can't survive on that unpaid leave and ask ourselves what measures we in this Assembly could take

to assist them in actually being able to use a compassionate care leave should they need to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Stony Plain, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. The goal of Bill 203 is to lessen the financial and emotional strain placed on Albertans acting as informal caregivers for seriously ill family members. This would be accomplished by amending the provincial Employment Standards Code. If passed, this bill would ensure up to eight weeks of unpaid leave over the course of a 26-week period. An employee would need to present his or her employer with a signed medical practitioner's certificate confirming that the family member on behalf of whom the employee is taking leave has a serious medical condition and has a risk of death within 26 weeks. While away from work, there would be no risk of loss of employment and no reduction in pay or seniority upon returning.

Mr. Speaker, part of belonging to a family means being there for one another. It means being there in times of happiness and joy and also in times of need and hardship. It is in times of terminal illness that loved ones experience some of the greatest hardships a family can bear. Perhaps more than any other time it is important that the love and support of one's family members be made readily available. The opportunity to take a leave of absence from work provides recourse for individuals put in the position of acting as informal caregivers for terminally ill family members.

Currently Alberta is the only jurisdiction in the country that does not provide employees with compassionate care leave. Whether they are caring for elderly parents, children with a disease or long-term illness, or any family member who requires immediate aid, informal caregivers in Alberta should not have to choose between their families and their careers. Mr. Speaker, balancing the obligations within a family and at the workplace is often challenging and stressful under normal circumstances. However, if a family member becomes seriously ill, the significant challenges and stresses of being an informal caregiver while holding down the responsibilities of a job can often be too much to handle.

Because Alberta's employment code does not provide employees with compassionate care leave, there are a number of Albertans every year who turn down offers, lose their seniority, and lose their jobs due to the responsibilities of an informal caregiver. Mr. Speaker, this is why a number of companies take this into account when designing their employee benefit plans.

In a 2002 Statistics Canada study it was found that out of the 1,784,000 informal caregivers in the country over 300,000 were located in the prairie provinces. As our provincial economy and population continue to grow, I feel this proposed legislation will provide a greater sense of security for those Albertans who are working and acting as informal caregivers. Mr. Speaker, Alberta was built by hard-working families that did what was necessary to make ends meet. Nevertheless, they always found the time and made the effort to care for their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, I can only imagine how difficult it must be for individuals who have families to be informal caregivers, but I think it is important to mention that families can often help each other out with commitments relating to informal care. In some cases a spouse, sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, or other relative may be able to help relieve some of the stress and workload from a

primary informal caregiver. I know this because I've seen families share the responsibility of informal care albeit one family member usually takes the majority of the responsibility. This is the reason for Bill 203 explicitly proposing that the primary caregiver and only the primary caregiver is to be entitled to a leave of absence.

As we debate this bill, I think that we also need to consider the individuals who do not have anyone to help them in fulfilling their caregiving commitments. Not only can it be more stressful for an individual who does not have anyone to turn to, but it can also be more difficult financially if this person does not have a spouse, partner, or someone else to help out with their finances in cases where a job was lost or pay was reduced.

4:20

However, Mr. Speaker, just because Alberta is currently the only jurisdiction in Canada in which informal caregivers are not entitled to compassionate leave by law does not mean that it isn't provided for by other means. There are a number of businesses, companies, and other organizations in the province that have compassionate care leave written into their own benefit policies. While this practice is both admirable and commendable, it is not universal. An individual who is working for an employer that does not provide compassionate care leave is left with few options if a family member falls gravely ill. The options are to quit their job or risk being let go in order to care for that family member. In reality, the choice is between a rock and a hard place, and nobody should have to be put into that situation.

Bill 203 would eliminate this scenario and facilitate greater consistency and predictability for employers and employees alike. In addition, this bill provides us with the opportunity to not only bring Alberta in line with the rest of the country; it represents an opportunity to increase investment in families and communities and foster greater domestic stability for everyone living in Alberta. As a government we need to do what we can to help promote stronger families and communities because they are what makes this province vibrant and diverse both economically and culturally. Mr. Speaker, I believe that Alberta has always sought to provide families and individuals across Alberta with a sense of employment security at the time they need it the most. I also believe that this government has done a competent job at doing this.

I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill before the House for debate. It allows us to take a closer look at how employment legislation can impact Albertans and provide them with supports. Any time that we are given the opportunity to examine how to protect Albertans and their employment standards is an opportunity that we ought to take advantage of in the form of a lively and constructive debate.

With that being said, I look forward to hearing the comments of my hon. colleagues on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise with great pleasure to support a bipartisan bill. As some of the members have pointed out, it's long overdue. As a person who has actually had the unfortunate or in some cases fortunate opportunity to have gone through this multiple times in my life I don't know which is worse, when you go through it or if you watch people you care about going through it. It's problematic, and it's amazingly painful. So this is aptly named, you know, compassionate care leave.

For me, I think that it is sufficient, but I would hope that the government would actually take a cue from the hon. member who

submitted the bill. There's a lot of work that can actually be built upon this. We talked about the financial burden that affects a family when this happens. Here we have a bill that actually protects employment, but there is no income coming in, so there is still a financial burden. People have experienced this. But there's more to it, and that's why I suggested that maybe the government take a hint from this bill and build upon this later in a government bill in that there is an opportunity also that we can actually save money in health care by providing home care where loved ones or people who can provide that compassionate care can actually do that full-time. It's a complex issue that will require tremendous effort, I think, but it's something that still can be done.

I want to share a couple of examples, one in particular of an experience I had recently, Mr. Speaker. It's about a man by the name of Mike Troitsky. Mike was a farmer in my area, a gentleman, and a man of integrity. I befriended him very late in his life, and he impressed me significantly. When he was in the last days of his life, I will tell the hon. member that introduced this bill that for Mr. Troitsky this was a long period of time. To watch his family go through their compassionate care, particularly his wife, Mary, both of them in their 90s – this is something, as I just shared, which is really painful, to watch another family go through this. They struggled. They had the ability to do the things that they needed to do, but they still struggled as a family because it is so emotional and so painful.

To have mechanisms in place so that family members can care for loved ones and not suffer any kind of outside or superfluous penalties unnecessarily is significant to me. It does show the compassion of the government when we are able to put forth legislation. In this case, this is a private member's bill, but it is something that I think all members can relate to. It's with great honour that I – I enjoy that we can actually find a bill that we can agree on. Even though it is the job of the opposition to actually scrutinize and criticize and go through line by line to see if we can improve it – because it's always to improve – the fact that we're making a step in the right direction is something that for me is an honour to acknowledge the member, that we've done something. We've taken that one step in the right direction, and I'm really proud of that fact.

I just would like to take the next step, too. That's the cue that I've asked this government to pay attention to, to look at what this member has done. Look at it, build upon it, and bring forth a government bill that expands this and makes the system not only work on compassionate care but improves our health care, too. There's a lot to be done as we take a look at what goes on here.

There's a lot to be said. There's a lot to talk about. Most everything has already been said, so with that Mr. Speaker, I again thank the member, and I encourage all members to pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak as well to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. I want to start by commending the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. The process of running for office, consulting with constituents, finding people within your constituency who will be supportive, and getting yourself elected is a difficult process. The hon. member, first elected in the election of 2012, not only went through that process in Edmonton-South West but as he went through that process was alive to what he was hearing from his constituents about what their concerns were.

After all, Mr. Speaker, that is probably the most important role that each of us as MLAs can bring to this House, to have that active ear, to have that opportunity to listen to our constituents, to understand what are the most fundamental issues for them in their lives, not so that government can take over their lives for them or run their lives for them or in any way reduce the challenges that people have in their lives because all of us grow from the challenges we face. There are some things that are really important, and having that opportunity with loved ones as they go through times that you cannot control as a family, sickness and even death, are things that are not something that we can control as individuals.

There are times when there is an appropriate role for legislation, for policy, for intervention, if you will, to help people. As a society we've done that on an informal basis over the years: obviously, by stepping up for our neighbours, by being there for our family. But we live in a much more complex world, so sometimes those simple things that we used to do together as members of a small community, whether that was a small community in terms of a village or whether that's a small community within a large population area like Edmonton, it's how we come together as community and care for each other. That's really the fundamental.

I really do believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, by bringing forward this bill, is showing actually the very nature of the compassion of our society in terms of understanding how we can come together to assist each other in a time of need and then how that translates, in terms of listening to your constituents, into developing public policy and bringing it forward for approval.

I wanted to start, Mr. Speaker, by putting that forward because I think it's a lesson for all of us in this House in terms of understanding that in the day-to-day back and forth and the things that get thrown out and the challenges that we make to each other there are some fundamentals. The fundamentals are about how we care for each other in our community and how we create policies and, indeed, legislation as a society not to take over people's lives but to fundamentally be there for people when they need it so that we can all live with respect and dignity in our community. That, really, to me is what this bill is about and the effort that the hon. member has made.

4:30

Now, it does fall within the purview of Human Services. The Employment Standards Code is an act which comes under the purview of my department. I've heard a number of hon. members today say: "Well, this should be a government bill." "The government should bring forward this bill." "It should be on the government to do this." I think that sometimes when people make those sorts of statements, they don't actually really have a deep appreciation for the process for developing government policy and legislation. I could say to the hon. members that this is actually going to be a faster route to bringing this in than if it was done as a government bill. Why? Well, because as a government bill there's always a commitment to – democracy is a wonderful thing, but it's not fast. It requires consultation. It requires discussion.

We have an Employment Standards Code, Mr. Speaker, and that code deals with many, many items. Indeed, it does need to be reviewed from time to time, so sometime in the next little while a process for review of the Employment Standards Code will actually be formulated. That's in the works right now. If we get through the approval process to say that, yes, this is something that should be on the agenda for this year – obviously, Mr. Speaker, you can't do everything every year – if we get to the

stage where we're bringing it forward and say that we can do this this year, then we will have to start the process of consultation. We take that very seriously. I'm not making light of it. It's a very important part of the process. Even an act like this, which every speaker in the House so far has supported and indeed I support, will have people out there, particularly small-business people, who will say: "How can I afford to do that? How can I afford to keep a position open for a year and willingly take back an employee? That's a burden on my business. How can I do that?"

When we're making changes to something like the Employment Standards Code, we have to have an opportunity for everybody to be heard and listened to in that process and understand what the balances are in our community and in our society. What are the things that we do to make sure that, yes, it's still possible for people to carry on business and be encouraged to do so yet build into that the things that are necessary with respect to leave for sickness, a reserve leave so that people can be encouraged to give back to their community in that way, and yes, indeed most importantly, compassionate care leave?

We will have a review of the Employment Standards Code, I hope. I'm hoping that it will come forward in the near future to a community near you. But it's not a short process. It's a long process, and it is a very complex process, and it is a detailed process. Typically something like the employment code can't easily be dealt with in isolation. You have to look at it in terms of what the overall regulatory burden is, if I can put it in that context. Most people wouldn't think of this as a burden, but in fact it's a regulatory burden that you're putting on business, and it has to be looked at in that context.

In fact, I would say that, no, it shouldn't be a government bill. This should be a bill that the House embraces as a private member's bill, as a one-off piece to the Employment Standards Code, which we can move on now if we want to. We can make this change because we think it's something overriding, overarching, very important to be done. We can do it now. We may need to take a little bit of time to figure out how that affects any necessary regulations. So it would come into effect on proclamation. Rather than waiting for the full, robust review of the Employment Standards Code and have this as a piece of it – and I've signed I don't know how many letters in the last little while, Mr. Speaker, saying exactly that to people who've written in asking for this amendment: yes, we will be looking at that in due course when we review the Employment Standards Code.

You know, I don't like signing those letters. I don't like saying: "Well, you know, that's a good idea, but wait for it. We'll get to it. We'll do the process. We'll consult the public. We'll consult the businesses that are affected. We'll have this ongoing discussion." I don't like to do that, but in fact it's part of the democracy that we're in. Part of any democracy is that you just don't mandate things; you actually consult. You actually take them out and see what the consequences and perhaps even the unintended consequences might be before you bring something forward.

That's the process that we tend to do with most government bills, Mr. Speaker. We don't sort of dream them up overnight. There's a process. I can tell you that as Government House Leader I will have started this year already sending out a notice to my colleagues saying, "What's your legislative agenda for next year and for the next three years? What's on the horizon? What are we planning to do?" We'll be asking them for templates on next year within a month. We'll be looking at saying: "Okay. Well, what have you done? Have you done the consultations that are necessary to get that on the agenda? If you haven't finished the consultations by September and if you haven't got policy approval

by October, what makes you think you're going to get on a spring agenda?"

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. There's emergency legislation that comes forward from time to time on something that needs to be dealt with in a hurry, but typically the legislation that's done in a hurry is not the best legislation. I can tell you that from experience. Almost every piece of legislation the government has ever got into trouble on was something that didn't actually go through that reflective and democratic process of consultation, discussion with the people who are affected. All of those steps need to be taken.

Now, private members' business allows you the opportunity to do something that speaks out, that says that this should be done notwithstanding that whole process. It does have its risks because it doesn't go through that consultative process. There are ways in which those risks can be ameliorated by going to committee, for example, and having the standing committee or legislative policy committee of this Assembly look at it and do the consultation there, but even that type of consultation tends not to be as broad and thorough as you might want for public legislation, which is going to have to stand the test of time. So even the one-offs that we all embrace shouldn't necessarily be done too enthusiastically.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I think this is one of those pieces of legislation that one should move on because it does speak to something in each of us. It speaks to all of the things that we hold dear in terms of what it means to be family, so I would ask the House to pass this bill.

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

If there are no other speakers – member, you have spoken already.

Ms Notley: Under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: There is no 29(2)(a) on this portion. Sorry.

Ms Notley: There isn't?

The Deputy Speaker: I am positive. Thank you.

If there are no other speakers, I would invite the Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a heartfelt thank you to all hon. members who rose to speak on this bill and shared their personal stories. As discussed, the goal of Bill 203 above anything is to introduce compassionate care leave into the Employment Standards Code. Research, consultations, and analysis all indicate that this bill would be of economic and social benefit to all Albertans by helping to contribute to strengthening our families and communities while reducing job loss.

Bill 203 contains the reasonable requirement that employers allow workers eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave in which to care for terminally ill family members. Again, some Alberta businesses already have this leave built into their benefits packages. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would introduce consistency across the board so that both employers and employees would be clear on what their rights and duties are with respect to caring for sick loved ones. Bill 203 would contribute to reducing health care costs and free up palliative care beds. By reducing the number of palliative care beds that are occupied, it would lower costs for our health care system and free up health care workers to provide services to those not fortunate enough to have family members there for them.

This piece of legislation is the most appropriate means at our disposal of strengthening our employment standards as well as making Alberta an attractive place to live and work in this time of labour shortage.

Mr. Speaker, I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding this bill. I would like to thank everyone who has participated in this debate and urge all hon. members to vote in support, a vote that takes a step towards positive change within our province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order?

Point of Order

Question-and-comment Period

Ms Notley: Yes. Under Standing Order 13 I'm asking you to provide further information on your decision to prevent me from asking questions under 29(2)(a). Having just looked at 29(1) and (2), I see no limitation on the application of 29(2)(a) to debate which occurs during private members' business. I'm wondering if the Speaker could cite for me the limitation which he suggested I was subject to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I believe that the only reference that I have to speaking times in this particular portion of debate in the House refers to 29(3)(a), (b), and (c) and does not refer to 29(2)(a), hence the reason I did not recognize you. So no point of order, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

4:40

Bill 204

Irlen Syndrome Testing Act

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to make a motion regarding Bill 204. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1) I stand to refer my private member's bill, Bill 204, the Irlen Syndrome Testing Act, to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities.

This motion is not debatable. However, I would like to make a few short comments. I'm referring Bill 204 to our Standing Committee on Families and Communities to bring awareness to an issue within our communities which is very important to many Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I have invited doctors, therapists, screeners, diagnosticians, and Helen Irlen, founder and executive director of the Irlen Institute in California, to come before the committee to help us determine the need to recognize Irlen syndrome and our responsibility in helping children with reading and other learning challenges.

If a child or an adult has problems with reading comprehension, misreading words, problems tracking from line to line, reads slowly or hesitantly, loses their place frequently, or avoids reading, experiences headaches or nausea, is fidgety or restless, among many other symptoms, this child or adult should be tested for scotopic sensitivity syndrome, or Irlen's.

Irlen syndrome negatively impacts the lives of many children and adults throughout the province. Mr. Speaker, we can change that. We can make their lives better.

Standing Order 74.2, proceedings on bills referred to a committee after first reading, states:

(1) When a Bill is referred to a Legislative Policy Committee after first reading, the committee may conduct public hearings on the subject matter of the Bill and report its observations, opinions and recommendations with respect to the Bill to the Assembly.

(2) Upon the concurrence of a committee report that a Bill be proceeded with, the Bill shall be placed on the Order Paper for second reading.

It is my hope that after the public hearings have been conducted, the committee shall report that Bill 204 proceed and be placed on the Order Paper for second reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried]

Bill 205 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2012

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to make a motion to refer Bill 205, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2012, to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

I'm referring this bill because I believe that the aim of this bill is to ensure that there is a mechanism by which concerned stakeholders can contribute to the setting of fishing quotas each year. This amendment proposed by Bill 205 would expand and formalize the consultation process by writing it into the existing Fisheries (Alberta) Act.

The intent of this bill is to make sure that the consultation process is direct, fair, consistent, transparent, accountable, and inclusive of all stakeholders. It would consist of any fisheries department, including commercial fishermen in decisions which impact commercial fishing quotas for the upcoming fishing season. As well, under the provisions of this bill commercial fishermen who wish to initiate the consultation process would be able to do so themselves. In order to do this, commercial fishermen would be required to submit a request for consultation following the notice of changes to industry quotas. By receiving such a request, department officials would be required to consult with the affected stakeholders.

The report that would be done would have to be published so that people could then see the consultations. The criteria by which these quotas were determined as well as the statement and final quota would be made public. In addition, the report would be made available online and would include information on scientific indicators of the health of fish populations in the different lakes. The point of publishing this report would be to demonstrate that meaningful consultation has occurred and that stakeholder concerns have been seriously addressed.

Mr. Speaker, although the province has regulations in place that necessitate consultations with commercial fishermen when making decisions that affect their livelihoods, there is no consistent application of these regulations, and that's exactly what I'm trying to do in Bill 205. Because the result has been inconsistent with the requirements of legislation, regardless of how well intentioned those regulations have been, I want to make sure that whatever conflicts arise, we can resolve them.

As there is no set of legislation to standardize regulations and there are instances in which stakeholders such as commercial

fishermen are not consulted in a direct and timely manner, I want to make sure that this bill will go forward. I'm referring it to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, and I ask all members to support that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and the fact that there's another bill coming and we've made significant progress today, I would move that we call it 5 o'clock and move on to private members' motions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Resource Development in Urban Areas

509. Ms Jansen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a working group to review whether adequate policies are in place for urban communities with regard to oil and gas development.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 509. I'm proposing this motion because I believe that oil and gas development is the lifeblood of this province and that we have to work to reconcile conflicts between nearby residents and oil and gas companies. Providing clear standards will help both affected residents and oil and gas developers.

I proposed Motion 509 to help ensure that similar situations to the oil and gas development in my constituency near the communities of Royal Oak and Rocky Ridge do not occur in the future. That situation is still ongoing, and I'm working with the Minister of Energy to find a solution that satisfies all parties. In Rocky Ridge and Royal Oak an oil well that could be productive for half a century was proposed 270 metres from the nearest home and 130 metres from the local shopping centre.

The problem is not solely the short distance between the proposed development and the residences. It's also the lack of community engagement and consultation over safety requirements. It's traffic, it's noise, it's odour, and it's lighting for a development that might be in their neighbourhood for 50 years. If the proper protocols were in place, perhaps the uncertainty that exists in my riding for both residents and the energy industry could have been avoided.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population is growing, and as our population grows, so does the footprint of our communities. Naturally, this results in new residential, new commercial, and new industrial land development on previously undeveloped land. In addition, new technology has increased interest in mature oil and gas formations throughout the province. Many of these mature formations, which were developed far away from farmhouses on agricultural lands decades ago, are now in close proximity to dense housing developments. Previously developed wells may need extensive servicing to rejuvenate production, and formations that were long believed to be tapped out may flourish once again with new technology. Moreover, formerly unprofitable formations not seen as economic under past prices and technology are now

being exploited. New technology and continued population growth means a potential for increased conflict.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Albertans understand that there'll be local impacts from resource development, but I believe it's our responsibility to do everything in our power to ensure that resource development is undertaken in a way that is sensitive to local concerns. For instance, our government has a strong track record when it comes to environmental leadership, being the first jurisdiction in North America to implement legislation to curb greenhouse gases. Keeping this in mind, I believe that studying the adequacy of current policies is a necessary step to ensuring that oil and gas development policies work for all Albertans. Indeed, with the development of regulations for Alberta's new energy regulator this seems the optimal time to make adjustments to the current practices that are needed.

In the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor spoke of Alberta's continued goal of responsible energy development and resource stewardship. Ensuring that residents who live in close proximity to resource development are not left worse off due to economic activity is the key to ensuring we fulfill that goal.

Resource extraction industries, while they generate substantial economic activity, can also greatly increase road wear and traffic. Additionally, the effects of oil and gas development, being a 24-hours-a-day business, can change when the traffic comes. I believe our government would increase the local buy-in for resource development while ensuring that the province continues to foster its reputation for being a welcome environment for business by improving policies surrounding oil and gas developments near residential areas.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure other hon. members would be able to point to situations in their constituencies just like the ongoing problems we face in Rocky Ridge and Royal Oak. Motion 509 calls for the examination of policies "for urban communities with regard to oil and gas development," and I hope that in conjunction with the development of regulations surrounding the new energy regulator, we are able to put in place updated standards for oil and gas development throughout the province. Updated standards will mean a streamlined process for oil and gas development while increasing community acceptance by clearly laying out the standards for the responsibilities of oil and gas development proponents.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Motion 509 urges the government to explore options to the problems that I have been talking about. In my opinion, Motion 509 would keep us on the path to ensuring that all local roads impacted by resource and industry truck traffic are adequately maintained. I hope that this debate will help inform current efforts and implement new regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that our government and our Energy minister are working hard to ensure responsible energy development in Alberta, but I also believe the government has to look for better ways to do things, not solely resting on our laurels but ensuring continued responsible resource development.

I look forward to hearing the perspectives of all our hon. members from all sides of the House, and I urge you to vote in favour of Motion 509. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and talk to the Member for Calgary-North West's Motion 509 as I was involved in the energy industry for many years before I dove

into politics. I do believe that this is a good way to alleviate some of the urban concerns that we're dealing with around oil and gas development. You know, we saw in the campaign period last year that there was quite a bit of concern coming from outside of Calgary, and I do know it's not just specific to outside of Calgary. It's in many areas. I'm in mainly a rural riding, but we have one city and some bigger towns that are affected also and many rural people that live on farms that have this issue also.

There are regulations in place. They've been in place for over 30 years, I believe, and they take into account the different wells, if they're sour or sweet gas, and pipelines and facilities. You know, I would ask the hon. Energy minister if there have been many issues where those setbacks were, I guess, too close, if there are any instances where there have been issues because the setbacks weren't followed.

We must ensure that the regulations are in place so everybody can be safe. Safety is the number one concern. We have to come up with the right balance between industry and the population in our communities. We're going to continue to see as the province grows, you know, that for many wells that are drilled now, in ten years the encroachment of the communities will be coming up to them. It's something that's going to have to continuously be watched and monitored to ensure that our communities are safe.

The oil companies are doing a tremendous job. The technological advancements that we've seen in the past 10 years – I was consulting on a rig, and we were over by Drumheller up on a riverbank. We drilled a horizontal well right underneath the little community of Rosedale. We were half a mile away. I think it was a 2,500-metre horizontal well, so we were well far back of any setback needed. So there are advances in technology so that these pools of gas and oil can be accessed from different distances, which is good. The member mentioned going into existing wells and recompleting them, doing different processes to get the resources out of the ground. That's something that's going to have to be looked at also.

Many municipalities do have in place regulations for when you go to drill in their areas. You know, there are school bus routes. We couldn't do rig moves during certain hours, on certain days. We had to watch in communities on Sundays. We couldn't do any rig moves on Sundays because a lot of the families were out travelling and we didn't want to have any interference. Also, there were many times in areas when we weren't allowed to move our rigs at night for the safety of the people travelling the roads, the safety of the rig crews and the truck crews that had to work in the dark.

I think we're going to continue to see issues come up. We have the new regulator now that's going to be looking at many issues, I believe, when they come up with the new regulations. I hope the member is confident in the new regulator, in their ability. I'm not sure why she would want to establish a working group. I'm not sure if she meant that the working group is going to be the regulator or if she wanted to have a separate working group to advise the regulator. Regardless, I think that within the regulator and their structure this would be an issue that they'll be looking at because I'm sure that she will be keeping up with the Energy minister to ensure that it's looked at.

I will remind you that I put forward some amendments to Bill 2 that would ensure that landowners, environment, and industry – all their concerns were going to be addressed under the regulator. I guess we will see as the new regulations come out.

I will be supporting this motion under the pretense that this issue will be addressed under the new regulator and the new policy management office so that the regulations are made not just taking in industry concerns but taking in community concerns and the

safety of our public so that regulations can be made in the best public interest.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was with great interest that I listened to the Member for Calgary-North West's interesting motion to strike a committee to consult on oil and gas developments in and around urban centres. It's interesting timing considering that we've just passed a new energy regulator with regulations that are going to be passed throughout that process. It seems to me that that would be an interesting way to go about getting those concerns met, through those regulations and whether something can be worked out there because that is essentially going to be the law of the land.

5:00

Whether a committee is necessary to discuss this or not, I am not so sure, but I will applaud the member for taking this issue to the fore. It has been an issue in her constituency that has been bubbling for about the last two years. It's very important for that member to be engaged with her constituents, to be seen to be highlighting their concerns in the Legislature, and this is an excellent forum to do that in.

It reminds me. I read a book – don't giggle; I did read a book; I saw that look – called *All Politics Is Local* by Tip O'Neill. It really has some neat tips on sort of the practical, nuts-and-bolts politics that you need to do in this business to keep onside with your constituents. What we have seen through this motion is a political document meant to show the constituents in her community that she's taking their side, and I applaud her. Whether it's the correct forum or not, who exactly knows? Sometimes these things will intertwine and supersede and the like. I would doubt very much that a committee will be formed in this matter, nor do I actually see how it would interact with the developing of the regulations, but again the politics of this is bang on. We're highlighting a concern.

If I could go a little further in this, if we look more at some of the underlying effects of the hon. member bringing up this private member's motion at the time and some of the issues that may actually influence future government policy, that is the more interesting part of this debate.

Hey, another thing you guys should all know from the Tip O'Neill book is that it says to never stiff a server in your area. Even if the service is horrible, you tip them and tip them well because they talk to people, okay? That is just one of those things I learned, so carry that with you and remember that. When in your constituency, even when given poor service, you give a tip, and you smile. So there you go. You learned something from me.

Anyway, one of the larger societal issues at play here is maybe, in fact, urban sprawl, which, in my view, is one of the symptoms of the way Alberta has grown over the course of the last 50 years, especially our two large urban centres, Edmonton and surrounding communities as well as Calgary. We have large footprints that have superseded anything that could have been imagined 50 years ago. In fact, when I moved to Calgary in 1977, I think the edge of town was Varsity. Well, we've come a long way from there, and the hon. member's constituency is part of that new development that has occurred over that time. We are reaching those limitations. In my view, urban sprawl, if we don't start developing policies around it, may be to this province's peril in the long run.

I've read some reports on this issue from the Van Horne Institute which say simply that with the cost of public transportation, the cost of infrastructure and roads and the like cities may actually crumble underneath the weight of providing these services as they extend further and further out into the hinterland. There may be some policy objectives along that line that might dovetail nicely with this committee or possible committee or look at the more broad thing of what actually urban sprawl looks like and what policies should be implemented to do this.

I note that Toronto has now gone through two variations of greenbelt legislation. The first one didn't work. The second one was imposed and is apparently doing a much better job of seeing a densification of that city. These may be some things that we want to look at in this Legislature.

Returning to the motion, I applaud the member for bringing this up. I applaud the member for taking her constituents' issues to heart. I encourage her to work closely in the development of the regulations when they're consulted on and the like. I'm not certain if her committee will see the light of day, but I know the hon. Minister of Energy told me that if it is the wisdom, he looks forward to working with them very, very closely and going to the member's constituency and hearing the concerns.

In any event, I thank the hon. member for bringing this forward. It was a privilege to talk. And remember: tip your servers well.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Energy, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you get talking about a motion in this Legislature, one never knows where the discussion will lead. Here we have a prime example of that this afternoon, and I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his very constructive advice to all of us on how to work with our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 509 is a very important initiative by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. I'd like to start by acknowledging and paying tribute to the good work that this hon. member has undertaken. I was not the Minister of Energy for more than a few days, it seems to me, before the hon. Member for Calgary-North West was speaking to me in a very persuasive manner that brought to my attention these concerns of her constituents, that of course were fresh in her mind, having just come through an election. We all had just come through the election. You know, I was really pleased to have a chance to work with the hon. member, to meet with some of her constituents who had concerns about a particular circumstance in her constituency.

It seemed to me, Mr. Speaker, that at that time this was a concern that we would see more of over time in this province. As communities grow, as the energy industry continues to expand, as technology expands, the potential is there for difficulties in the relationship between developed areas – that could be rural or urban – and the energy industry. I actually thought this was a really important opportunity for me as a new Energy minister to sit down with the Member for Calgary-North West and her constituents and listen to them and understand what their concerns were. Through the piece we've been working over recent months, month in, month out, and I'm optimistic that together with this motion and other work that is under way, we will find a way to ensure that interests are addressed appropriately over time.

My department has undertaken a lot of work as well to try and understand what the alternatives are. I know folks in industry are watching this topic with interest as well because this has an impact upon them. What we're seeking to do through the introduction of

Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, which this House passed last fall, is ensure that we find that right balance, the balance between environmental responsibility, the immense economic opportunity that we face in this province, and the landowners and the neighbours around the landowner.

You know, we're seeking balance here. I look forward to moving forward with the new Alberta energy regulator in the very near future. We've announced the chair of the governance board, and that will be moving forward soon. In that context, I've spoken often of one of the early opportunities we have to use the new Alberta energy regulator and the policy management office, which is located within the Energy department and works closely with ESRD as well. This is a topic that we can give to the policy management office. They can engage and work with interested parties. This will be a very good, constructive, great example of the kinds of balances that we have to find throughout Alberta in some urban, maybe even in some rural communities.

I support this motion by the hon. member, and I would support it in the context of using the policy management office as that group that could be used to develop the policy, to listen to Albertans to ensure that we find the right regulatory construct to address issues like this.

5:10

The policy review, I'm sure, will likely result in the modification of existing regulations. I'm quite confident of that. It will be exceedingly well informed by the good work done by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, who has, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has pointed out, been working hard to represent her constituents and ensuring that their issues are brought to the forefront, that they're addressed in a thoughtful manner, and that we find an outcome that is good not just for the people of Calgary-North West but for all Albertans.

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to support my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to this issue. I also thank the member for putting forward this motion so that we have an opportunity to speak, at least generally, about the kinds of challenges that her motion brings to the attention of this House and the kinds of challenges that I think we need to wrestle with throughout the province. You know, she did a good job of outlining some of the specific ways in which it impacts members of her constituency. In fact, I guess my one observation with respect to that is that, of course, it's not just limited to the good examples that she discussed with respect to her constituency, but indeed the issue exists throughout the province in a number of different contexts.

With that in mind, I guess, because I think the issue that she's identified is an important one – and I thank her for that – what I'm going to say is that I'm not as keen on the strategy that is being proposed for resolving this issue. That is certainly not as a result of having any questions with respect to the good-faith attempt of this member to put something down in writing that might bring about some kind of outcome. The difficulty, Mr. Speaker, that occurs to me very quickly as someone who's been here since 2008 and someone who's been meeting with community groups and environmental groups and land-use groups and surface rights groups from across the province is that, you see, we've been having a lot of discussion, and we've had a lot of committees, and

we've had a lot of talk about this challenge that we have in Alberta with respect to balancing development needs on one hand and community needs on the other. The concern that I have is that if we have another committee, we might be still having this discussion 10 years from now without any concrete outcome.

I note an article that was brought to my attention by our staff today. It was published in something called *Business Edge News Magazine* in 2004. The issue around sort of the natural gas recovery process around Calgary was discussed in 2004. At that point there was discussion of the fact that a senior-level provincial task force, including deputy ministers from five different ministries, was established to look at the conflict around land use in relation to the growth, the ever-growing footprint of the city of Calgary on one hand and the nonrenewable resources which many companies were hoping to extract from those affected lands on the other hand. We had this high-level group of deputy ministers in 2004, but we still don't seem to have any solutions identified, and we still seem to have difficulties.

I was looking through some notes around issues that have occurred in Peace River. Well, there are a number of issues in Peace River. There are a number of concerns and complaints by citizens around the interaction between oil and gas development on one hand and the impact on quality of life for community members on the other. I was just looking at one particular article that identified the fact that the company in question had increased its production by 400 per cent since 2009 around bitumen extraction, and in the course of increasing its production by 400 per cent, the impact on the adjacent community members as far as odour and that kind of thing had been rather significant. It had been discussed repeatedly in the community.

There's an article that came out just in the last two or three days or maybe in the last couple of weeks where, of course, the MLA for the area is saying: "Well, there is a serious odour problem here, and the question is really: what are we going to do about it?" Then he's saying: you know, I've certainly talked to the Energy minister, and he thinks that there's something we need to do about it. But then, of course, this problem has been growing since 2009, and I've been hearing from people in that community since before I was elected, actually. Again, the question becomes: how much consultation are we going to have before we start doing something about this?

The same thing exists, you know, if you look in Fort McMurray. We all know that there are tremendous challenges there around urban development. Well, there are ownership issues and compensation issues as well as the whole issue of proximity of development to the actual community, the same thing. I was able to find some commentary by the mayor at that time, back around 2006, 2007, around: "We've really got to get a handle on this. You know, we really need to figure out what to do about this conflict."

Then, of course, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that we already have in the province is the land-use framework, which is theoretically supposed to be the forum within which for several years now people who represent these competing interests are able to come together on a geographic basis and a community basis and a regional basis in order to come up with recommendations for how we would introduce and amend our regulations around these things. As we all know, this process, again, has been a lot, a lot, a lot of talk, with almost no regulatory structure having been introduced notwithstanding that we've been talking a lot for several years.

I actually remember being in estimates debate with the former minister of environment, who is no longer a member of this House, and him acknowledging: well, we haven't probably been

able to resource the land-use framework process very well, so we're not able to really move as fast as we need to, and we're not able to provide the resources necessary to ensure that we've got an adequate level of expertise at these consultations in this policy development process. Well, okay. Here we are a few years later, and in fact that ministry has seen their resources reduced even further.

My concern is that, absolutely, there is a challenge in this province, whether we're talking about urban conflict with industrial development, whether we're talking about downstream impacts of industrial development on, effectively, rural communities, whether we're talking about farmers and the conflict that they experience occasionally with development. This is not a problem that is new. It is not a problem that's going away. It is a problem that everybody has identified repeatedly, and it's a problem that we've not managed to get a handle on.

I think it's because at the end of the day this government is never really ever going to compel the energy industry to come to the table and bargain with somebody who's there primarily with the overarching public interest on their side. I think that instead we have a relationship where the oil and gas industry comes and tells the government what they want, and then the government, acting as an agent for the oil and gas industry, proceeds to try and sell it to the people of Alberta. As long as that's the model of how our government develops our industry in Alberta, we're going to continue to have lots of consultations without any kind of meaningful regulatory change.

5:20

I do very much applaud the member for raising the issue, but I'm afraid that more talk, more policy, more consultations, more conversations – I think some people in the House have heard me wax a little bit less than poetical about the overuse of the words “conversation” and “collaboration” in the most recent edition of the government's message box and speaking points. Nonetheless, as long as that's what we do and we don't realize that we actually have to put rules in place, we're not going to get anywhere.

It's the same, you know, with the monitoring. We can monitor forever, but if that monitoring is not associated with a set of rules about how practices need to change and standards need to be met, who cares if we monitor? One of the folks in my office pointed out: “You know, you can watch a train crash in slow motion. You can put 16 different cameras on it, and you can watch that train crash occur. You can make sure you get it filmed from absolutely every angle, but if you don't ultimately find a way to make the train go onto a different track, then the train crash is going to happen. It doesn't matter how many different ways you look at it.” That is my concern.

I think we need to come up with a slightly more defined strategy in this, but I do thank the member for giving us an opportunity to have a conversation about an issue which continues to present itself to Albertans and that requires a substantive form of addressing it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, Motion 509 is being brought forward by my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. It calls on the government “to establish a working group to review whether adequate policies are in place for urban communities with regard to oil and gas development.” This is a very important matter for consideration and will have consequences well into this province's future for all of our citizens. There is always a risk when oil and gas facilities are in close proximity to residential and

other public districts and, in fact, rural areas as well. As such, making sure that these facilities are safe and do not negatively impact nearby residents is a matter for a wide-reaching research report.

The policy management office can be the vehicle for this research for several reasons. The policy management office is the government's link to the Alberta energy regulator. The office deals with both the Department of Energy and the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and is the interface of the enhanced system for oil and gas. This interface manages policy development as well as policy assurance.

A chief responsibility of this office is to ensure that government policy is communicated effectively to the regulator. Alberta Energy is currently undertaking a thorough evaluation of policy options regarding energy development in this province. It's important to examine the policy management office in this regard. Mr. Speaker, the policy management office facilitates policy integration, policy guidelines, and communication between policy development and policy assurance stages. A key role of the office is to ensure that there's a common risk management approach that is used throughout the system to promote consistency and reliability.

Mr. Speaker, the office both supports and facilitates a co-ordinated approach to public management, which is precisely what we're talking about here today. Going forward, the policy management office will engage stakeholders in the development of the new rules of practice. Enhanced public engagement will allow for the continuation of informed and prudent policy development. Consequently, landowners will have the opportunity to influence regulatory procedures to a much greater extent than has been previously known.

Further, policy assurance is facilitated by the implementation of a single regulator, that is responsible and accountable for all assurance functions. The policy management office provides a single window of contact through which to select policy compliance tools. The delineation of respective responsibilities for policy development and policy assurance will help warrant stronger accountability and the reliability of outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, policy assurance functions are consolidated in a single regulator in order to provide a single point of contact and consistent procedures throughout project life cycles. Through the use of a systematic and common risk management framework and a formal sustainable resource and environmental policy management office, the entire system will ensure policies are developed and applied in a co-ordinated and integrated fashion.

The use of a performance measurement framework and public reporting mechanisms will enable Albertans to know with great accuracy how the system is performing. Equally as important, Mr. Speaker, these reporting mechanisms will help to inform Albertans on how they can provide input regarding the improvement of any systematic gaps that will be identified. The system must continue to support Alberta's investment competitiveness as well as meet the desired social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Ultimately, it is for the residents that safety precautions are being taken. The policies put in place to protect high-density communities must reflect the input of these communities' residents.

This motion for awareness should go to the government, and the policy management office can directly review the intent that this motion proposes. I would like to see the intent of this motion also discussed within the land-use framework because, Mr. Speaker, with another million people coming to this province for the opportunities for industrial, cultural, and environmental activities, we must know how to use our land, protect agricultural and

recreational land and the wilderness, and certainly protect it for industrial use as well. A harmony of interests is what is important to move this province forward in the progressive way that this government envisions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this motion, but this motion, or the subject, should have been brought forward in an earlier debate. The reason it has to come forward now – it's missing some clarity here. To save the hon. minister, whom I have the greatest respect for, time and energy, I would prefer that it be a working group, and two members from this caucus would be happy to join that working group and actually save on the labour of some of my fellow members across the aisle.

I want to point out that there are a couple of things I find ironic, maybe even comical. My colleague here, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, used the word "pretense" accidentally versus to "premise" an assumption upon, and I just found that sort of ironic because the word "pretense" is something that did come up in the debate dealing with the single regulator.

You have to remember that this is a serious issue. I will make light of a few of our past debates, but the fact is that it doesn't diminish how serious this issue is. I remember when the citizens of Calgary first spoke up. I've been involved with a lot of landowner rights since long before I got elected, so for us in the rural area, particularly the rural communities, as oil and gas has approached, these issues have always been first and foremost in their concerns dealing with their rights, the issues of water, all the complicated issues dealing with oil and gas development, and there are a lot. There's a lot here.

What I want to say is that we missed a lot of this when we passed through this bill dealing with the single regulator. We talked about this extensively. The single regulator can be a good process. It can be one of those streamlining processes that we would all agree upon, but you have to remember that there was a piece of legislation that did say at one point in time that the good citizens of northwest Calgary, southwest Edmonton, and all of Alberta had a right, a reasonable opportunity to learn the facts, and that's no longer in legislation. That was removed. They had a reasonable opportunity to challenge the facts. That's no longer in legislation. That's been removed.

5:30

Here we are with a bill for a single regulator that's supposed to be taking care of this motion, that's supposed to be taking care of these concerns. What we have here is an issue of how we're going to find a way to now address this. That, to me, is the fundamental flaw of the legislation that was passed. The legislation should have by definition made sure that there was a protocol that when the regulator was going to make its rules, when they were going to make the regulations, it was going to have to adhere to the legislative mandate to make sure this subject was covered, and that legislation didn't do that.

Will the regulations actually cover it? Will the rules address this motion? The answer is that we don't know. That's why this motion has come forward. It's also why I'm going to support this motion. We need answers to this. That legislation should have been clearer, and it was not. Here we are now again dealing with this issue. If I understand it correctly – and correct me if I'm

wrong – it appears that it's going to go to the policy management office, and that will now be who's going to address this.

But there are a couple of things that I think even the policy management office doesn't have guidance on. It does not have guidance on the public interest. Those words were removed totally from legislation. Can they do it? Sure they can, but they're not required to by legislation. That was the point of going all night discussing why public interest needed to be accounted for in the legislation. It was a mandate that anybody who would actually be part of this working group or part of the policy management office would have to by legislation make sure they address the issues of the public interest, which is what this motion is all about. That, to me, is very important.

I would ask the hon. member who has brought this motion forward if she can find the time – I believe it's directive 051. There's a draft document that has come out. If you don't have a copy, I'm happy to send you a copy. It should concern everybody and anybody in here that deals with oil and gas on a landowner's issues of: what are adequate policies? It's not yet been approved, but it is dealing with emergency procedures around the development. I have real serious concerns with this draft. Hopefully – hopefully – they change it. What they've done is that they've really made it, in my view, a little bit more precarious in dealing with emergency preparedness, particularly around things like sour gas and other issues dealing with oil and gas development.

The point I'm trying to make is that we're dealing here with a motion that talks about whether or not adequate policies are in place. As I read the motion, I know about the possibility of this draft directive coming forward, and I know about the legislation on the other side. I don't see where either one of those at the moment is supporting the intent of what this motion is here, which is actually making sure we cover all the bases and do it right.

I see no excuse for why we can't do it right. There's no excuse at all. We have the ability. We have the qualified people in the industry, of course, but we also have the ability to make sure that as legislators we get it right so that nothing goes off the rail, so nothing gets missed. It's inexcusable to have to drop the ball on any particular application, on any particular issue dealing with these types of concerns. That is, I think, the entire argument here. This motion should not have been necessary had we done our job the first time in creating the legislation for the single regulator. This absolutely could have been included in that.

I would disagree with the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East when she brought up a statement – and I apologize if it woke me up and caught my attention – about landowners being able to influence the regulator. I have appeared in front of the regulator in more hearings than I can probably count, and I have to tell you that if landowners were not able to influence the regulator in the past, I do not see where the legislation now can give them the extra ability or that extra authority to actually influence.

I will tell you that sometimes they turn into a gong show. We had a board member on one of these boards. I will leave the gentleman's name out. I consider him a friend of mine. He was appointed to one of the hearing boards because he had agricultural experience. We wanted somebody on the board that had agricultural experience, but the only agricultural experience he had was that he had a grow op in 1969 that he got arrested for. That didn't work out. Now, my farmer friends here, whom I have great respect for, always tell me, "At least he had a cash crop." I say: "That's true. That's true." That does not diminish the seriousness of what we're dealing with.

The point is that sometimes in these hearings our landowners feel powerless in front of it. Now, some of you over there would argue that they're not powerless, but I can tell you from the

position I've been in time and time again with landowner concerns, they feel absolutely powerless. When you stand in front of these commissioners and they change the rules on you on the spot – I'll give you a prime example. I just brought this up recently with the minister of environment. At an Environmental Appeals Board hearing some of those people who had a concern – and this is the same type of process – were not allowed to bring their concern forward. They put them together on one panel. They were all affected by the same issue. Three or four got to speak, but they gave them a time frame. Those who had what I would call distinct concerns affecting their property, their homes did not get to participate because the clock ran out. I've never seen that in any process.

In a court of law it takes as long as it takes. You get to make your case. Judges don't like repetitiveness. They will stop you. But if you have information you're bringing forward, they will listen to you. They will give you that time. These boards are supposed to do the same thing, and in my experience I've seen time and time again where people did not have the opportunity to actually bring their concerns forward. They have no recourse. They have absolutely no recourse. They don't understand the system in many cases, but the board is all powerful in many ways. They are the master of their own destiny as a quasi-judicial panel, and they get to make up their rules. They're not bound by the rules of evidence that a courtroom is bound by. That is clearly labelled and stated in the legislation.

Clearly, there are significant issues dealing with these concerns that are brought forward in this motion. I am definitely going to support the motion. I would like to go beyond that and make sure that these people have a right to be heard.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could you advise me of how much time I have left?

The Deputy Speaker: You have 10 minutes, hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Ten minutes. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured to rise this evening and speak to Motion 509. I will in fact be supporting it. I'll speak in favour of it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, my apologies. We're coming to the end of the time allotted, so six minutes. Please proceed.

Mr. Oberle: Okay. I will be speaking in favour of it although I'll say that it might not seem like that at times, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I'll congratulate the Member for Calgary-North West for her advocacy on behalf of her constituents although I need to point out to my constituency that I, too, have advocated to the Energy minister, as have the members for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, Lesser Slave Lake, and, I'm sure, others, Mr. Speaker. It's an issue of concern, to be sure.

I'm not sure that a working group is the right path forward, but I certainly think there's a discussion necessary. The minister talked about the policy management office. That's fine. I do think there's a discussion necessary.

I'm also not sure about the urban viewpoint of this although I'm always willing to look at something from a new angle and certainly this issue as well. Indeed, there are some very serious urban issues, Mr. Speaker, and we do need a discussion. Development

within a populated area is indeed an issue, and, you know, we have to make sure that it reflects the modern realities of energy development and of urban development. Just from a safety point of view, we have to talk about emergency management, and notifications and evacuations in an urban environment are certainly concerns although I'll readily point out that the Member for Calgary-North West did not confine her conversation just to safety. There are certainly others of nuisance and noise and those sorts of things. That's fine. Very clearly, we need to have a conversation.

Let's examine this issue briefly from another point of view, that being the rural point of view, Mr. Speaker. Now, it's convenient for us to think of energy development as being out there or up there in the north. That's not peculiar to urban Alberta. Even in rural Alberta we think of the energy industry as being out there. Most of the energy development, particularly in the northeast of our province, is out there in the green zone, and it's not integrated with the residential land base out there in very many places in our province.

5:40

I would like to point out that my constituency is a little different from that, Mr. Speaker. I have four towns in my constituency that are the largest population centres – no cities, four towns – one village, and the rest are rural municipalities, a couple of First Nations reserves, and one Métis settlement. Two-thirds of the population in my constituency do not live in those four towns. They live out there, and they are completely integrated with the development of the energy industry.

That's not peculiar to my constituency. In fact, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley has 36 wells within one and a half kilometres of his house. You're not going to get that in an urban environment. They're all out there making noise and dust and everything else, so the same issues apply out there in rural Alberta.

If it was just about safety, Mr. Speaker, even then I would argue: what about rural residents? What about somebody that lives three miles down a road that's a dead end and they have to pass six oil wells on the way into their property? What happens if there's an accident when they don't have access to high-speed Internet and often don't have cellphone coverage? The issues of notification and evacuation are every bit as pressing. But, again, the member did not confine her remarks simply to safety. There are other issues.

While I'm in agreement with the motion, I think we need to have this discussion in light of how the energy industry interacts with and impacts all Albertans, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. The issues that define the interface between human residents and industrial development are not at all confined to safety, and the member did not try to suggest that they were. Any discussion of this going forward should respect that fact.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to ask Donna Dahm – she's a constituent of mine who bought a lovely house, probably hoping it would be a retirement house, on a little-used road allowance near a provincial highway but well set back, in a serene, really isolated setting. A few years later she finds herself sitting at the intersection of that same provincial highway, on a four-lane industrial road that's just blazing with tanker traffic and oil field traffic. Because it's right at the stop sign, there have been quite a few accidents there. Truckers have fallen asleep, and parts have fallen off trucks. She's probably a couple of weeks away from being able to open a used truck part shop on her property there. She's going to find out I said that, and she's going to be pretty mad at me. She's already pretty mad at me, mad at the fate of her property there.

Go further than that. Ask Donna Dahm and the surrounding residents there what they think about the oil and gas industry, although most of them in some way are employed in the industry. Not one single person I've met is actually against development. That area is called Three Creeks, and it's been an area of major concern to me and through me to the minister of environment and the Minister of Energy. The odours in that area . . . [Mr. Oberle's speaking time expired] I thought I had six minutes, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You did when you started, hon. minister, but I do appreciate your points.

At this time I would give the mover of the motion the opportunity for five minutes to close debate. The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank everyone who spoke to this motion and contributed to this debate. Certainly, I absolutely acknowledge the concerns of our members and members across the aisle who have the impact of this in their own areas.

Oil and gas development does present, right across this province, regardless of where you live, really unique challenges. Those challenges exist whether you live on a farm, whether you are close to a busy intersection with a lot of tanker traffic, whether you're on an acreage, in a town or a village or a city, as we are quite painfully finding out right now in Royal Oak. I hope that any

review of the policies that we are talking about will make an attempt to speak to these challenges and these opportunities.

Resource development in Alberta, most of us would agree, is the key to our prosperity. So, too, is the health of our communities and the well-being of all of our constituents. As such, we really do need a policy that sets out clear expectations for development both for the nearby residents and for the project proponents.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 509 simply urges the government to review whether adequate policies are in place for oil and gas development. I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding the motion, and I urge all hon. members to vote in support of Motion 509.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the rules that suggest one motion gets considered a day and even though it's not 6 o'clock, I would move that we adjourn until 9:30 this evening, at which time we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m.]

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