



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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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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Luan	Strankman
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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Sherman

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Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
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Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

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Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. O Great Creator, grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life we have been given and also of the emptiness we feel when the life of someone has been taken. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country, as did members who came before us. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, as is our long-standing custom, we pay tribute to members who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Gerard J. Amerongen, QC July 18, 1914, to April 21, 2013

The Speaker: Today we mourn the passing of hon. Gerard Joseph Amerongen. He was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on August 30, 1971, as the Progressive Conservative candidate for Edmonton-Meadowlark. He served as the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for four consecutive terms, being re-elected on March 26, 1975; March 14, 1979; and November 2, 1982, through until May 8, 1986. He served as Speaker for the entire time of his tenure.

As the eighth Speaker of this Assembly Mr. Amerongen oversaw many aspects of the modernization of this Assembly. The establishment of *Alberta Hansard* and the commencement of the broadcasting of proceedings in 1972, for example, resulted in Mr. Amerongen becoming the first Speaker to administer the Legislative Assembly Office on a full-time basis.

Mr. Amerongen was responsible for having the daily Speaker's procession enter through the main doors of the Chamber rather than through one of the side doors. He was also responsible for how we refer to the building. The physical building "doesn't legislate," he stated. That is why today we are in the Alberta Legislature Building, not the Alberta Legislative Building.

Today, as we mourn this significant loss, we are reminded of the families who support members like hon. Mr. Amerongen. With our admiration and deepest respect there is gratitude to members of the families who share and/or have shared the burdens of public office and of public service.

Today I would like to welcome members of the Amerongen family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. After I've introduced all of them and each of them has risen, we will thank them with our applause: Michael Amerongen, son; Henry Amerongen, brother; Greg Amerongen, nephew; Peter Amerongen, son; Cathy Roy, daughter-in-law; Max Amerongen, grandson; Sara McKeon, granddaughter; Bob McKeon, son-in-law; Hedwig Lankau, granddaughter; Rhoda Rodriguez and her daughters Nicole Rodriguez and Therese Rodriguez, devoted caregivers. Hon. members, let us thank them with our applause for the outstanding, dedicated support they gave to a former Speaker of this Assembly, Mr. Gerard Amerongen. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, stay standing, please, because in a moment of silent prayer I'm going to ask you to please remember hon. Mr. Amerongen in the way that you may have known him, respecting all of the great accomplishments that he brought forward during his time serving exclusively and only as the Speaker of this Assembly.

In a moment of silent prayer let us reflect on his great accomplishments and what he did for us and for all Albertans. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual ever shine upon him and his service. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery is a distinguished officer of the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps. I'd like to introduce him to you and through you to all members of this Assembly. Lieutenant-General Peter Devlin is the commander of the Canadian Army. He is to retire in a few months after 36 years of service to our nation and sovereign at home and abroad. His exceptional leadership and dedication have been recognized by Canada and by the United States. He is a commander of the Order of Military Merit and has been awarded the Meritorious Service Cross and the U.S. Legion of Merit. An officer who has seen the face of conflict through his service in Cyprus, the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, he has had a full, varied, and challenging career. Lieutenant-General Devlin is no stranger to Alberta, having been stationed here with 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, then located in Calgary.

He's accompanied today by the other member of his command team, the Army Regimental Sergeant Major, Chief Warrant Officer Mike Hornbrook. Mr. Speaker, I'd invite them now to stand and be warmly acknowledged by this Assembly for all that they have done in defence of Canada at home and in harm's way abroad.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will start with school groups, and I'll recognize the Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the Minister of Health, to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 74 students and their teachers and accompanying parents from Greenfield school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They're seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. Accompanying the students are their teachers and group leaders Miss Ellen Reid, Mrs. Lori Tytler, Mrs. Alicia Dowdell, Mrs. Lilia Yu, Mrs. Reena Dhaliwal and parent helpers Mrs. Tiffany Bailey, Mr. Jeff Warner, Mr. Andrew Happer, Mrs. Monica Robson, and Mr. Jamie Zuniga. I'd ask the students, the teachers, and the parent helpers from Greenfield school to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of junior high students from the Kneehill Christian School, located in my constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. These engaged junior high students made the trek to Edmonton today from their school in Linden to spend the afternoon learning first-hand about what goes on here at the Legislature. I'd ask that the eight students from Kneehill Christian School along with their teacher, Terri Miller, and parents Bruce and Jodi Reimer and Sid and Glenda Toews

please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let's move on, then, to the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very dear friend, confidante, and community activist from the community of Calgary-West. This is Brenda Meneghetti, who is a community leader who effectively led her community to create the Westside Recreation Centre, one of the most outstanding recreation centres in all of North America. On this one-year anniversary of our election victory I'm delighted to ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you several individuals from the Canadian Cancer Society that are here today to acknowledge cancer awareness month. Cancer awareness month provides an opportunity for Albertans to unite in the fight against cancer. We are all wearing our daffodil pins here today to let everyone know that people living with cancer do not have to face cancer alone.

Here with us is Ms Barbara Bird. I assume she's up in the members' gallery or one of the galleries here. If I can ask her to stand, please. She works with people living with cancer. She's a two-time breast cancer survivor. She is originally from Nova Scotia, has been an Albertan for two years, and loves it here. I also met this morning with Angeline Webb of the Canadian Cancer Society. She is from Edmonton. Also, Chelsey Anseeuw is with the Canadian Cancer Society as well. She is two years in Edmonton from Winnipeg, loves it in Edmonton but is not quite yet an Oilers fan. I'd ask that all three of them rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Julene Polis and Roger Polis. Julene's brother Andrew has Down syndrome, and he has been living in the Michener Centre for the last 47 years. Over the last number of years his situation has become more complex, having developed Alzheimer's. Michener staff ensure his safety, health, and happiness. Andrew is totally dependent on the Michener Centre to thrive and survive his disability. Hon. members, please join me in welcoming Julene and Roger on behalf of Andy with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House two people who are very connected to their community, who work very hard there and are actually the epitome of what Alberta is in terms of increasing civic responsibility at all levels of government. Those two people are Kelly Bitz and Richard MacQuarrie. I'd ask them to rise today and receive the warm welcome of this House. I might add that they love how I speak with my hands, and they're fans of mine. Again, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, followed by the leader of the Liberal opposition.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly

the Board of Trustees for Red Deer public schools. I'll ask that they rise as I call their names. We have with us today Bev Manning, vice-chair, as well as trustees Bill Christie; Dick Lemke, who is the brother of the hon. Member for Stony Plain; Dianne Macaulay; Cathy Peacocke; and Bill Stuebing. Also with us is the associate superintendent of business services, Cody McClintock.

Founded in 1887, Red Deer public schools is celebrating 125 years of excellence in teaching and learning. Public schools were one of the first institutions established by the community. Citizens came together, elected trustees, built schools, hired teachers, and, yes, even collected local taxes to provide the support needed for this important institution. Today Red Deer public schools under the leadership of the board of trustees, through outstanding teachers, administrators, and support staff, and in partnership with parents in the community provides outstanding education to more than 10,000 students within the city of Red Deer. It plays a vital role within our community and is achieving excellent results.

As Red Deer public schools celebrates its 125th anniversary, please offer your warm reception to our guests today.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions, but firstly, on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Meadowlark I'd like to honour Speaker Amerongen and thank his family for sharing him not only with Edmonton-Meadowlark but also with the province in the Chamber. May God bless you and your family. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a surprise introduction. Let's see if the guests can figure out who they are. They're sitting in the members' gallery. They have lived in the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark for 12 years. They moved to Canada at the age of 23 with their newborn son from Albania, a country threatened by civil war. They came here for a dream, a dream for their son to have a better quality of life, a safe life, and a better education. Interestingly, their dream has come true. It's the first time that they'll be sitting here watching their son work as a page on the floor of this Assembly. Their son Donald Ademaj was nice enough to set up this little surprise for his parents. He's been a page for two years, and it's the first time that his mom and dad are coming here to watch him work. Hon. members, please join me in welcoming Dash and Alma Ademaj, the proud parents of our page Donald, with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction, hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Vivian Charest. Vivian is a volunteer co-ordinator who works with the Michener Centre. Her daughter Laurie is a 46-year-old resident of Michener. Laurie has lived at Michener for 40 years. Vivian is here to ask all of us to keep our hearts open and to keep Michener open. Hon. members, please join me in welcoming Vivian on behalf of her daughter Laurie with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly nine representatives from the Polish Veterans' Society, an Edmonton-based organization celebrating their 75-year anniversary. My guests are seated in the members'

gallery wearing their military dress, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names: Mr. Jan K. Kucy, president; Mr. Stan Podraza, first vice-president; Mr. Jan Hliwa, second vice-president; Mr. Kaz Zajac, correspondence secretary; Mr. Bogumil Czuprynski, recording secretary; Mr. Leon Bozmowski, member of the Polish Veterans' Society; Mr. Mike Markow, member of the same society; Mr. Kaz Chodorski, member of the Polish Veterans' Society; and Mr. Tad Szczepanski, audit committee member. I would now ask that we provide them the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

1:50

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a few more introductions to go here, which I was just alerted to. We have Calgary-Mountain View, who has a quick intro. If you can be brief, then, Clerk, let's allow them to do that quickly. I think the hon. leader of the New Democrats had a brief one as well. I'll allow it, these two. Please proceed quickly.

Dr. Swann: It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to the House three women who are here from the Michener Centre: Eileen Broberg, Mabel Stanway, and Carolyn Cordell. Eileen is attending on behalf of her daughter Donald, who is a resident of the Michener Centre, and says that if her daughter is removed from Michener, it will be a death sentence. I would ask each of them to rise, and we'll give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: One more, hon. member?

Dr. Swann: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Beth Gignac is project lead for cultural transformation with the city of Calgary, a bright, articulate progressive who ran for Alberta Liberals in 2008 and is passionate about public service. She is committed to open, transparent, accountable government and concerned with social justice. Let's have her rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the great pleasure of introducing to you and through you to this Assembly four members of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional, or FMLN, which is the governing party of El Salvador. Zoila Beatriz Quijada Solis is one of the founding members of the FMLN and a legislative representative in that country. Liduvina Magarin is also a legislative representative and a member of the Secretariat of International Relations for the FMLN. Edwin Leonel Viscarra and Leonel Viscarra are both representatives of the FMLN residing here in Edmonton. I would now ask all four to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, could I have unanimous consent for one more brief introduction? Does anyone object?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, very quickly. Thank you.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very dedicated volunteer from the city of Leduc, Mr.

Mark O'Flanagan. I had the privilege of presenting to Mark today a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal. He's been a paramedic, a firefighter, a volunteer, a nurse, and a STARS volunteer flight crew member as well as a manager, and he was a first responder at the Evergreen trailer park after the 1987 tornado. Mark is here with his wife, sister-in-law, and two nephews as well as Rick Sereda from the fire department in Leduc. Mark O'Flanagan, receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Prescription Drug Coverage

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health continues to undermine public confidence in health care with his ham-fisted approach to setting drug prices. The minister's ad campaign just doesn't tell the truth about what's happening: higher prices, pharmacy closures, and eventually drug shortages. Yesterday the Premier even acknowledged that there will be price increases under the plan. She said: you may see increases in some and decreases in others. We have many, many examples of increases. Will the Premier pull the government's deceptive advertising that tells Albertans their drug prices are going down?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is the difference between why Albertans voted for us a year ago today and not the opposition. You can't make decisions in the short term. You have to make decisions that fundamentally change health care to ensure that it's sustainable so that we can continue to have a public system. That is what our plan is doing, and that is the information that we'll share with Albertans.

Ms Smith: Albertans certainly did not vote to have their drug prices go up.

Mr. Speaker, the turmoil in the pharmacy industry is causing stress for patients as well as for pharmacists. Alberta's across-the-board centrally mandated drug prices, what we've been calling Fred-icare, will mean pharmacy closures, mostly in rural Alberta. Now, the Premier's own caucus members must be telling her the same thing by now. Can she tell us, all of us, how closing rural pharmacies is good medicine for Albertans?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual what we see from the opposition are false suppositions. We have an incredibly representative caucus that's worked very hard with business and community leaders in communities across this province both in urban and rural Alberta. What we see is a sensible plan to transition to lower drug costs for Albertans, better accountability for taxpayers' dollars, and a more sustainable health care system. That's what we're delivering.

Ms Smith: No. Pharmacists in those ridings would sure hope their MLAs would speak up for them because there is additional uncertainty now because of the pharmacare plan that was part of the budget. Now, it appears to be another broken promise. The Premier keeps saying that this new seniors' drug plan will be better than the current system, but we keep hearing that seniors are going to end up paying more out of pocket for their drugs. What assurances can the Premier give us that her new pharmacare plan won't be as badly botched as the Health minister's generic drug plan?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the new plan going forward is going to be a plan for all Albertans, not just senior driven; this is for all Albertans. We're going to have an advantage for so many Albertans that don't have a plan right now. We know that there are seniors right now that are in the most need that are looking forward to this program with no deductions and that there will be many seniors that will have a great benefit from this new plan.

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

Ms Smith: Well, hopefully we'll see the details soon, so we can see whether there's truth in that.

Health System Executive Expenses

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we also asked the Premier about health executives' expenses, and she said, "We've asked the opposition . . . to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to provide the information to independent agencies that can take a look at these matters." It kind of sounds like she's saying that it's the job of the Official Opposition to hold health executives to account for their lavish expenses. While we accept that we have been a very effective opposition, why is it that the Premier is not asking the Health minister to do his job?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I was pretty excited a year ago to see the Wildrose become the Official Opposition in this province. I'll tell you that when we take a look at the issues that have been part of a previous government's decisions with respect to Alberta Health Services and agencies that were in existence seven or eight years ago, we want to make sure that wherever there were decisions taken that were not appropriate, we're able to deal with those. That's why we're looking for and seeking independent advice. The Minister of Health has made that announcement. Of course, if there's any information, we'd be very welcome to receive it. Alberta Health Services is doing that work, too.

Ms Smith: Okay. Here is the kind of expense we'd like to recover. In 2005 Joanne Stalinski, VP of wellness, expensed \$4,000 for the eight-day Hoffman process program that examines your childhood to "allow you to have the choice to let go of many limiting belief systems so that you can enjoy the banquet of life instead of just settling for the crumbs." Now, I'm not sure that any Albertans would get reimbursed for that, but 18 months later, in 2007, the expense was approved by Jack Davis. What does the Premier think about that one?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as President of Treasury Board I am talking to the minister on a day-to-day basis. As the Premier has said, the minister has said that he will seek legal advice as to the possible collection of expenses that were approved by a health region that no longer exists for some expenses that are almost eight years old. Different than the opposition, we've actually brought into this Legislature the expense policy that is the gold standard of Canada. Alberta Health Services was one of the first agencies to adopt that standard. We're looking to the future, not the past like some other parties.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Questions ought not call for opinion. Please proceed with your third.

Ms Smith: Except they've asked Justice Wachowich to look at all of the expenses going back to the other health regions.

It is clear to me now that the Premier really does expect the opposition to do all of the work of finding all of the examples of all of the expenses that Judge Wachowich can study for possible repayment. Okay. If she wants us to do this for her, that's fine, but we could use a little help. Will the Premier give us a hand by ordering the release of all of the expenses of all of the executives of all of the health regions going back to 2005? Help us out.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, once again, as the hon. member is talking about expenses that happened five, six, seven, eight years ago, we have to ensure that we are protecting the privacy of some of those individuals. We need legal advice as to whether or not you can actually recoup expense from an organization that no longer exists.

Coming to the present, again, this government, this Premier have instituted the toughest expense policies and disclosures of any jurisdiction in Canada, and we are very proud of that. We're the leader in Canada under expense policy.

2:00 Health Services Performance Measures

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, in 2008, when this government announced the creation of the AHS health superboard, they promised major cost savings and efficiencies at all levels. Well, the very well-respected Canadian Institute for Health Information just released a report showing that since AHS has taken over, hospital costs have soared by 49 per cent, placing us a full 40 per cent higher than the national average. To the Minister of Finance or the Premier: how on earth can you and your government claim that centralizing health care has saved taxpayers and improved patient care when all indicators show that, in fact, the opposite is true?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, all indicators do not show that. As a matter of fact, when you have nine health regions – and I'll use some common sense, which the hon. members opposite don't have – that have nine different human resources platforms, that have nine different accounting platforms, that have a total of nine different CEOs, obviously, when you bring them together, you have some transition costs, which you would incur in any business that is amalgamating, but after that you're actually achieving the savings you desired in the first place. They are calculable, they are there, and we're very proud of what we've done.

Mr. Anderson: A 49 per cent increase. Unbelievable.

Given that this Canadian Institute for Health Information study shows that since AHS has taken over, the amount spent on long-term care for seniors has actually not even kept up with inflation, let alone seniors' population growth, and given that it is common knowledge that it costs far more to care for seniors in a hospital setting than in a proper long-term care facility, Premier, why does this government continue to chronically underfund long-term care for seniors while wasting billions unnecessarily by housing seniors in crowded and expensive hospital beds?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we know and all members of the Assembly know that the commitment going back to 2010 was to build over 5,300 spaces for seniors, modern spaces, not 10 by 10 rooms and a bathroom down the hallway, modern spaces for couples to live in. The investment is in the budget. We've made that commitment, and we will continue to make that commitment.

Mr. Anderson: Nice to hear the Premier actually answer a question once in a while.

Given that this government is always asking us for ways to be more efficient with taxpayer dollars, will they try this? Instead of spending billions on new hospital beds, how about reallocating some of those infrastructure dollars into new long-term care accommodations for seniors? Not only would this result in better care for seniors, but it would also open up hundreds of existing acute-care hospital beds without having to build a whole bunch of expensive new ones. It will help seniors and improve health care while saving money. Premier, will you try this common-sense Wildrose solution?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the member is not talking about the new Whitecourt care facility that we're going to build, because that wouldn't go over very well in my community.

We are making a very concerted effort to open up new spaces across the province. The next round of approvals will be in communities like Slave Lake, communities like Valleyview, communities like Rocky Mountain House, communities like Calgary, communities like Red Deer, and the list goes on. We'll have over a thousand new spaces that we'll be able to cut the ribbon on together, colleagues. Together. We'll all be very, very proud of that.

The Speaker: The leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Funding for Education

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked some questions about this government's broken promises. Instead of admitting that they didn't keep their word, the Premier and the Minister of Human Services resorted to the usual boilerplate and rhetoric, exactly the sort of the thing that led 71 per cent of Albertans to be dissatisfied with this government on trust and accountability. I think it will be therapeutic for Albertans and for the Premier herself if she were just to admit to one broken promise. To the Premier: you promised all-day kindergarten in every school within one year of becoming Premier. You didn't deliver. Will you please admit here today that you broke your promise?

Ms Redford: You know, Mr. Speaker, the commitment that we made to Albertans was to build families and communities, to continue investing in sustainable education, and to make sure that early childhood development was one of our six priorities. We believe that all-day kindergarten is a very important part of that. We have all-day kindergarten currently in more than half the school boards across this province, and we've given the option to parents in most of those jurisdictions to ensure that they have the choice. Now, we're going to continue to implement that. There's no doubt that we had some tough choices to make, but we're committed to making that program work.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was great to see the Premier actually get up and answer a question and sort of admit to not fulfilling her promise – more boilerplate, more rhetoric – so I guess the Premier won't take ownership of that broken promise.

Let's try again, and remember: confession, Premier, is good for the soul. Deep cuts are the order of the day for postsecondary institutions. Courses are being eliminated. Students, faculty staff, and administrators are in an uproar. To the Premier. You promised stable, predictable funding for postsecondary institutions and again you have failed to do so in the most spectacular fashion. Will you please admit . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, the commitment that we made to Albertans, including postsecondary institutions, was to ensure that we were focusing taxpayers' dollars building research and innovation and ensuring that we had the best postsecondary system in the country. We still fund our postsecondary system at a higher level per capita than any other jurisdiction in Canada. We are working with presidents to make sure that we are excellent across this province. That was what we were going to achieve, that was our commitment, and we're delivering.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, these are simple questions. They are defunding postsecondary by more than \$130 million today than yesterday. Nothing but boilerplate and rhetoric, Premier, to defend the indefensible.

You have broken nearly every significant promise that you have made in your quest to get elected, Premier. You are either completely incapable or completely unwilling to be straight with Albertans, and as the polls show, you have lost the trust and support of the majority of Albertans. To the Premier. Nobody voted for any of the things you are doing today. How can you claim any sort of mandate moving forward?

Ms Redford: This is what Albertans voted for. They voted for building infrastructure, increased health and education spending, family care clinics, insulin pump therapy, pharmacare, lower prescription drugs, a new Education Act, a tuition freeze, transparent government, whistle-blower legislation, a seniors' property tax deferral, stable municipal funding. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on, and we've delivered.

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

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, they voted to stop the lake of fire, and that's where it ends.

Seniors' Drug Coverage

Mr. Mason: Yesterday, answering questions about her broken promise to retain seniors' drug benefits, the Premier said, "We saw the opportunity in the past 12 months to do something better than what . . . was in place before." But, Mr. Speaker, the new plan is similar to the old plan, which she promised seniors she would reject. My question is to the Premier. How is forcing thousands of seniors to pay an arm and a leg for prescription medication better for them?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is wild speculation. The pharmacare program that will be introduced and developed with community stakeholders is providing better access to Albertans right across this province whether they are seniors or not. We know it's important to ensure that people have access to medication. We also know that it's important for that medication to be affordable, which is why we're doing the work with respect to the costing of generic drugs. What we would like to see from the opposition is some thoughtful consideration of an integrated plan that will actually serve Albertans better, which is exactly what we're delivering.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, they're cutting \$180 million out of the program and spreading it over more groups, so clearly thousands and thousands of seniors are going to lose their drug coverage, directly contradicting what this

Premier said in the last election. Will the Premier do the right thing and reverse this cut and retain the existing seniors' drug program?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we don't think that the existing plan serves Albertans well. We're going to ensure that we move forward with pharmacare because this allows us to put in place a sustainable plan for public health care that allows for people to get support for medication with reduced deductibles. That's what matters to Albertans, and that's what we'll continue with.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a budget cut, not a better program. Seniors shouldn't have to pay for this government's broken promises. Instead of continuing to break your promises, Premier, why don't you do the right thing and reinstate the universal drug coverage program for Alberta seniors and then extend it to others?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we need to introduce these changes. We can't keep going back. Whether it's the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the NDP opposition, what we can't do is to continue to maintain the status quo or, worse still, revert to programs that worked 20 years ago, when there were 2 million people in the province. We're a growing province. We know that we have a thriving economy. We know we have vulnerable people in our communities, and this pharmacare plan is going to support seniors and youth and provide access to 20 per cent of Albertans that can't get medication now.

Outcomes-based Student Learning Assessments

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, there is a battle brewing in the Battle River school division, and it all has to do with student assessment. You see, the division is moving toward a style of grading that uses achievement levels instead of the traditional percentages. Neither parents and teachers or students are very happy about this. To the Minister of Education: are you and Alberta Education in favour of this new form of assessment?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this government works with the school boards, and we respect the important job that they do on the ground. It's unfortunate that this member doesn't have the same confidence in those boards and those local teachers and those principals and those parents to be able to make those decisions. Those decisions are local decisions. It seems that they respect local decision-making only if they don't disagree with the local decision.

Mr. McAllister: I love it when a plan comes together, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the superintendent says they are moving to this assessment at the direction of Alberta Education: "The change to outcome-based assessment is not specific to [Battle River school division]. We are following the philosophy and direction of Inspiring Education." Minister, why are you implementing this new way of grading our kids when clearly it is a direction that parents, students, and teachers do not want?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'd encourage the hon. member to actually read the Inspiring Education report. Yes, there are lots of fantastic ideas in there that Albertans have brought forward and that are setting the expectation that we will deliver on. That's why it's very important that an Education critic should actually know

what's in it. The philosophies that are in Inspiring Education are not a regulation or a direction from Alberta Education. If a local school board makes an interpretation and wants to report in certain ways or assess in certain ways their kids to their parents, those are local decisions and need to be taken to the local table.

Mr. McAllister: Minister, I don't mean to make this personal. I asked a question on behalf of the people of Battle River.

Maybe we need some clarity. That could be what we need. Will you set the record straight and tell boards that they are not being directed to pursue this new type of assessment or implement this no-zero policy like the Battle River superintendent says Alberta Education is telling them to do?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we did have questions similar to this with the Dorval case, and the answers are similar. It's that the province sets standardized assessment four times during that student's life in their K to 12 education, at grades 3, 6, and 9 PATs and the diploma exams. Outside of that, the local assessment, the day-to-day assessment, the day-to-day reporting and engagement with the parents is critical, and it's critical that the local school boards be empowered to do that with their local administration. Now, this party may have flip-flopped on that, but it seemed to me that about a year ago they were strong advocates of local decision-making. Now if they disagree with the local decision, they want me to step in. On this side we're principled. We believe in the work local school boards are doing.

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

Review of Government Achievements

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time last year Albertans made a choice to build on our strengths and build for the future. They rejected the build-nothing approach and the one-way ticket on the Social Credit DeLorean back to the future, an approach that would have closed the door on the South Health Campus, family medicine, and extra ER capacity. This Social Credit rerun would have cut \$400 million from local communities, eroding our roads, public transit, sewers that keep our cities clean, and our parks that we trust to be safe and well maintained. To the Minister of Infrastructure: tell me how building modern health facilities, quality schools, safe highways, and other important infrastructure is better than the build-nothing approach?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, our province is growing rapidly. That's why we're building new health care facilities across this province, opening schools for more than 13,000 students, and building 3,000 kilometres of new and improved roads. It's simple: either we want world-class education or we don't; either we want state-of-the-art health facilities or we don't; either we want newer and safer roads or we don't. That's why Albertans rejected the opposition's build-nothing approach and gave us the mandate to build a better, stronger Alberta.

Mr. Fraser: Given that we must build Alberta and that one year of opposition policy would have meant that 35 new schools wouldn't have been started, potentially leaving thousands of students out in the cold, and given that the Leader of the Opposition said that our very best and most skilled teachers are no longer in the classroom delivering those front-line services, can the Minister of Education explain to me how working with our teachers and building our world-class education system is a better approach?

Mr. J. Johnson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are building Alberta. The most important thing for me and what we've heard from Alberta parents and families is that we put students first. The over 35 capital announcements since last spring are going to add 8,000 new spaces, and that doesn't include the 14 new schools that we opened this year. In addition to that, this year we've passed the Education Act. We've put the \$107 million, now \$110 million, back into Education, as the Premier promised. We're planning and we're going to deliver the 50 new schools and 70 modernizations. The other way we're putting students first is that we're a long ways down the path to inking and finalizing a deal between the ATA and the ASBA. We've been working hard with them, and now over two-thirds of the school boards in the province have signed on to this great deal.

Mr. Fraser: Given that we have to build Alberta, my final question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Given that the opposition questions climate change science, suggesting that the Obama administration is misguided and that we should have a deep discussion that the science is real, and given that the opposition would cut funding for clean energy projects, tell me, Minister: is this helpful at all in getting our products to market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] I've recognized the hon. minister for the answer. [interjections] Hon. members, they are the government; you are the opposition. The questions that are asked are asked to government members, and anyone from the front bench may answer that.

So would someone from the front bench of government please rise to answer this question?

Mr. Dallas: That would be me, Mr. Speaker. Undoubtedly, the opposition's reckless denials, their disregard for diplomacy, their denouncement of clean technology . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's try and re-elevate this level of debate and move on here.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, in 2016 they will get to ask all of the questions.

Opposition Alternatives to Government Policies

Ms Smith: We began voting on the back-in-debt budget last night. The Premier and her Finance minister have returned the province to more borrowing and more debt: \$17 billion in savings to be replaced by \$17 billion in debt, a sad legacy for our children and grandchildren. Of course, they spin it as building Alberta or going to the capital markets, but it's borrowing, and borrowing is debt. It's been quite a while since I asked this, but I never really did get an answer to my question. What is the plan to pay all of that debt back?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that a party who claims to represent business interests, who claims to represent the fiscal conservatives would try to take away the value of building today for taxpayers and wait until – oh, I don't know – five, six years from now to build the hospital in Whitecourt, to build the hospital in High Prairie, to build the hospital in Strathcona.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, you rose on a point of order at 2:18 p.m., during the hon. Minister of Finance's question.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Let me just explain to everybody in case they don't know where we're at. We're at the one-year anniversary of a lot of new people being elected for the first time. So there's a little bit of anxiety in the air, and we recognize that, but it's no excuse to break any rules or to lower the level of decorum, which we're all striving so hard to maintain, I know.

Hon. minister, would you like to conclude your comments, please?

Mr. Horner: I would love to, Mr. Speaker.

2:20 Opposition Alternatives to Government Policies (continued)

Mr. Horner: You know, rising on a point of order when I point out what they would have done had they been the government is an interesting piece of theatre, but it doesn't do anything about policy for government. [interjections] It's going to be a long day.

The Chambers of Commerce understand it, the Bank of Canada understands it, the federal Minister of Finance understands it. It's unfortunate they don't.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Smith: The Premier and her government are congratulating themselves for their first year in office, and in some areas we congratulate them, too, for adopting so many of Wildrose's good ideas like improving meals and bathing in long-term care, reinstating veterans' hospital parking passes, ending executive bonuses, imposing tough new rules on expenses, and speeding up the twinning of highway 63. When are they going to adopt another of our suggestions and scrap this horrible Fred-icare plan, that will force pharmacies out of business?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we're looking to conserve the publicly funded health care system. That will make sure that we have some choices, some tough choices for now and tough choices in the future, but we maintain that the publicly paid for system is a system that this side of the House will maintain.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Official Opposition is making a difference as we put Albertans first. We have another idea we'd like the government to accept. How about they take politics out of their infrastructure spending plan and create a full, public, prioritized project list using objective, published criteria? When can we expect that good idea?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as I've explained before – and members opposite have gone to the website and looked at our approved capital plans – there's a list of all the projects listed. That's a lot better list than the opposition's capital plan, that has no projects listed.

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

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, science has well documented the harmful consequences of tobacco use. Campaigns to dissuade tobacco use are persuasive, yet tobacco use remains strong with 17 per cent of Canadians reporting that they

are currently smoking. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Wellness. What tobacco reduction initiatives are currently under way in Alberta, and how do you decide what tactics to use?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member, sadly, is correct. In Canada tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease and death. In Alberta we've created a multifaceted approach to fight exactly that. The strategy features three priority legislative initiatives: restricting the sale of flavoured tobacco, prohibiting tobacco sales to minors, and protecting children from second-hand smoke in vehicles. We will ensure that the legislation will be well thought out and will be enforceable. There are other initiatives focused on discouraging Albertans from starting to smoke in the first place as well as helping them to quit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, my second question to the same minister: in these tough economic times, how much is this strategy costing the taxpayers of Alberta?

Mr. Rodney: A fair question, Mr. Speaker. I consider that we should think about the price of not implementing tobacco reduction initiatives because not only will it cost taxpayers more in the long run, but it also puts a huge strain on the health care system and the quality of life for all Albertans. Tobacco contributes not only to heart disease but also to several forms of cancer, resulting in approximately 3,000 deaths each year in Alberta alone. Those numbers are staggering. They're unacceptable. To facilitate the implementation of the strategy, the department will spend \$500,000 this year, and there are additional funds available as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. My final question to the same minister: are we seeing real returns on our investment, and what, really, is the end goal strategy, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you again to the hon. member. We need to measure progress; it's crucial. We do have ambitious performance targets, I want everyone to know. For Albertans 15 and older we're looking to decrease from 19 to 12 per cent; for those 12 to 19, from 13 to 6 per cent; for Albertans 20 to 24, from 30 to 20 per cent; for pregnant women, from 17 down to 11 per cent. Let's face it. Until it gets a little closer to zero, none of us will be truly satisfied. There are many other key performance targets, one of them being the estimated per capita tobacco sales. We want that to be decreased, chopped in half, as a matter of fact. We're confident that we will reduce tobacco use and give knowledge and the tools and the incentives to Albertans so that they can enjoy a much greater degree of wellness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Sign Language Interpreter Program

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of cuts to postsecondary Lakeland College will not continue its sign language interpreter program for the deaf community. Without

these interpreters simple, basic access to communication, a right guaranteed by the United Nations, would be in jeopardy. The Premier stated in her budget that it would not affect vulnerable people. That's simply not true. It's affected people with developmental disabilities, seniors, and, now it appears, the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. To the Premier: why don't you just admit that your government is not interested in protecting vulnerable Albertans? In fact, your budget just makes life more difficult for them.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that this Premier is very interested in protecting vulnerable people. This government is very interested in protecting vulnerable people. But our project is not to just add money and stir. Our project is to take a look at everything we're doing through results-based budgeting, through our social policy framework process, through discussions with Albertans about what poverty means to them and what poverty looks like in their communities, talking with real people about the real issues they face and finding real solutions for them. Yes, in a tough budget there are tough decisions to be made. But this government cannot be accused of not protecting vulnerable people. We put vulnerable Albertans first.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that one of the stated goals of Campus Alberta was to preserve the uniqueness of Alberta's schools and given that it is the only program of this type in Alberta, will you ensure that this program is properly funded and protect the basic rights of our deaf community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the minister has said that any program before its suspended has to come to him. I can tell you that the minister has committed that he will look at the need for this type of program in Alberta, and he will be exploring all available options during the review to suspending the Lakeland program.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that the need for this program is that people who are deaf and hard of hearing need sign language interpretation and the fact that this is the only program available in Alberta and the fact that these sign language interpreters are demanded almost two weeks in advance, that seems a compelling enough case. I hope you can assure us that the minister, because of these reasons, will not be cutting this program at Lakeland College. Is that what I'm hearing today?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that the minister said that he will review this very closely. I think it's important to understand that board-governed institutions like Lakeland College make their own decisions. They have to look at their own budgets and make the decisions based on what they see for their day-to-day operations. But I know that the minister has committed to reviewing this very seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who almost lost her spot. You're up next.

Funding for Postsecondary Education

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, today the University of Lethbridge did what this PC government refuses to do, tell us how the Premier's cuts to postsecondary education will hurt southern

Alberta students and their families. For instance, the university plans to increase their student fees by \$200 per student per year, a shocking 250 per cent increase, which more than offsets this Premier's bait-and-switch tuition freeze. To the Premier: why won't she admit that the tuition freeze means nothing and that Alberta students will pay the price for this Premier's broken promises one way or the other?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has made it quite clear that tuitions will be frozen. The minister has also made it clear that the universities or the colleges will not be able to just increase their fees on the backs of students.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they just did today.

Given that the University of Lethbridge also announced today that they will have 34 fewer professors next year, increasing class size while cutting quality and choice, and given that this comes right after both the Premier and her Minister of Incredible Claims stated that the loss of \$147 million could not possibly hurt our education system, will the minister admit that Albertans can be forgiven for concluding that neither the Premier nor the minister can be counted on as reliable sources of information when it comes to the real impact of her broken promises?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both our Premier and our minister have been very clear on the importance of post-secondary education to this province and to all our students. Both our Premier and our minister have said that postsecondary decreases in the budget will not be on the backs of our students, and we will continue to offer first-class education in this province.

2:30

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that today the U of L announced that they face a \$20 million deficit by 2015 – that's 20 per cent of their budget – and given that they've said that computer labs will close, libraries will stop buying new books, faculty research funds will disappear, and access will suffer, why won't the minister finally come clean and admit what everybody else already knows, that the Premier's broken promises mean only a more expensive, less accessible, and lower quality postsecondary education for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our minister has met with all 26 presidents from the different institutions. I know that they're working very closely to look at some of the issues that are facing them and at implementing the strategies and implications of Campus Alberta. Again, those will not be done on the backs of the students in this province.

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

Elder Abuse Strategy

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Elder abuse is one of the darkest issues facing senior Albertans. This type of abuse isn't always physical in nature. Often it takes the form of financial fraud, and in some cases seniors are victimized by those they know. The people who are most often taken advantage of are the ones that are least able to speak up for themselves. Can the Associate Minister

of Seniors please explain why seniors across Alberta are still waiting for the implementation of the elder abuse strategy despite its inclusion in the Premier's mandate letters to both Seniors and Health?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very serious concern. I will say that the majority of elder abuse comes in the form of financial abuse. It's been an issue that we've faced for many, many years, and I would encourage all members to phone our hotline, phone the RCMP when these issues arise. It is an issue that I'm working towards. We've had consultations around the province, and we're working closely with police forces in the province.

Mrs. Towle: Given that the implementation of the elder abuse strategy was a so-called priority initiative for the Seniors ministry last year and it is a so-called priority initiative for the Health ministry this year, will any minister finally do something about elder abuse? Or like another waffling Liberal politician, Stéphane Dion, do you find it difficult to actually make priorities?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, elder abuse is a very serious issue. Like I said earlier, if there's anybody aware of a senior being abused, contact the police services immediately, contact my offices. We'll do something about this.

On the overarching piece of the governance and the issue of elder abuse policy: we're moving forward on that file. It may not be as quick as many would like it, but I want to get the issue right.

Mrs. Towle: So elders should call the phone line while they're still being abused while they wait for implementation of the elder abuse strategy.

Given that an organization in Medicine Hat has already said that they have taken it upon themselves to investigate 70 complaints of seniors' financial abuse last year alone, when will the government recognize that this is an actual problem and start protecting vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we know it's an issue. We know it's an ongoing issue, and that's why I've committed to working with the police agencies across this province. That's why I've committed with our staff that we're going to take this issue very, very seriously, and we have been. We've been in consultation with groups in Medicine Hat, groups in Grande Prairie, groups all across this province. We'll take this issue on as a piece of work that needs to be concluded.

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

Oil Sands Royalties

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's oil sands developments demand complex planning and substantial investments, often billions, to undertake. In order to offset these massive project costs, a prepayment and a postpayment period is given to recover allowable costs for a given project plus a return allowance. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. How many oil sands projects have reached the postpayment period since the royalty regime of 2009 was implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, a well-designed royalty system actually strikes the right balance between returning a share of the profits to the resource owner while also

encouraging development and creating jobs and economic growth. Once payout is achieved, the producer pays a higher royalty rate. Today there are 115 approved oil sands royalty projects, 55 of which are in the prepayout stage and 60 of which are in the postpayout stage. I would say that the context within which all of these companies are working contributes directly to 1 in 6 Albertans having jobs directly tied to the energy sector.

Mr. Xiao: To the same minister: based on today's prices, how many oil sands projects are expected to reach the postpayout period in the next two years?

Mr. Hughes: Well, it's an interesting question, Mr. Speaker, given that, unlike conventional oil and gas development, oil sands developments require massive investment, as the hon. member has identified, often billions of dollars, and may require many years before full production can be realized. Currently we expect that there will be one more project that will reach payout during 2013, and then the next one after that we expect to reach payout in 2015.

Mr. Xiao: Again to the same minister: how significant of an impact can those postpayout projects have on our natural resource revenues, and by how much?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, these projects and this source of revenue are a very important source of revenue for the province of Alberta. Postpayout projects generally pay more royalties than prepayout projects and can reach 35 to 40 per cent in royalties at the maximum. Of course, this is directly affected by many factors, including particularly the price. I'm happy to report, though, that over the next three fiscal years the total royalty revenue from all oil sands projects will amount to approximately \$15 billion.

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

Medicine Hat Schools

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government likes to break promises to the people of Medicine Hat. Whether it's a new hospital, a new overpass, or a detox centre, this government announces, delays, reannounces, then delays again. In the government's evaluation of Alberta's schools six schools in Medicine Hat are now rated in poor physical condition, yet this PC back-in-debt budget cuts maintenance funding by 20 per cent. With this government's promise to refurbish 70 schools put on the back burner, what will the Minister of Infrastructure do to stop these schools from falling apart?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. First of all, there are no schools in Alberta that pose a health or safety risk to any of our children. Health and safety is our number one concern. We have a facility condition index that's done by every school, and there are only 15 out of 1,500 that are rated as poor. I'm sure those are the ones that'll be upgraded in the 70 mods.

Mr. Pedersen: Minister, you answered earlier – and it is simple – that you can repair schools now, or you can rebuild them later at a higher cost.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government doesn't have a public, prioritized project list and fails to give full details on which 70 schools will be receiving renovations and why, can the minister

tell the families in Medicine Hat that their six schools are near or at the top of this secret list?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I work closely with my colleague from Education, he works with the school boards in the province, and they have a priority list. As soon as we have the budget passed in the House, then we can announce the projects we're carrying forward. I'm sure the people of Medicine Hat will find that out.

Mr. Pedersen: Minister, you're picking winners and losers behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, how on earth can the minister break his promises to hard-working families who rely on these schools for the education of their children when he has been busy watching the cost of new MLA offices in the federal building skyrocket to pay for rooftop gardens and fancy auditoriums?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I don't want this party across the way scaring the good people of this province that their children are not in safe conditions in our schools. All schools pose no health or safety risk, and I hope they don't start fearmongering like they have done on many other projects.

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

Interoperable Information Technology Services

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General's justice innovation and modernization of services program, known as JIMS, was established to address old and antiquated IT systems used in the Alberta courts. To the minister: with the cancellation of the JIMS program how will the ministry reform issues in our courts that are backlogged by paper-laden systems and inefficient IT systems?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to see that this member as a new MLA is paying attention to some of these important issues. The cancellation of the JIMS program saves \$39 million. [interjections] Many people talk about saving money, but again we have done it in my ministry. Earlier this month I released the report Injecting a Sense of Urgency, that talks about some of the major recommendations for the justice system. [interjections] No one group or IT project can ease the burden, but JIMS to date has implemented 15 projects, including case management. We're going to have to stop it there in the interests of fiscal responsibility.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I appreciate your enthusiasm today, but there are just too many conversations going across the bow from the government over to the opposition, from the opposition to the government. Please, let's just curtail those for a few more minutes.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you have the floor.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I do indeed pay attention.

Mr. Speaker, given that it is now a year into the Justice and Solicitor General merger and IT operations are still operating as separate entities and with well-documented successes of shared service initiatives, to the Minister of Service Alberta: if we can't share services in a single ministry, what is the status of the shared services across all of government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first of all congratulate this hon. member today on celebrating his first anniversary as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. On behalf of all Edmontonians I'd like to say that members of the public are very pleased that he's in the Assembly and not out patrolling the streets anymore.

Mr. Speaker, he asks a very good question. The fact is that we want to get maximum value for taxpayers' dollars, and 80 per cent of government IT users are on one system, one domain. We're working to ensure that we get maximum value for our systems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to applaud the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on his leadership in ending the Alberta integrated information initiative. While well intended, it has however pursued an ill-conceived direction. Has the minister committed to interoperability and open-data standards?

Mr. Denis: Well, first off, it's a very rare occasion that a lawyer gets a compliment from a police officer, so I want to thank the member for that.

This is a rather tough and bold budget, and as the minister I need to sort through what are the nice-to-haves and what are the must-haves. I think that this member would agree that our number one priority is keeping police on the streets, keeping prosecutors in the courtrooms, and actually even adding more judges. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we've done.

Now, as a sworn officer this member knows that communication is paramount to law enforcement. His suggestion dangerously suggests that what works in the United States would work in Canada. Realistically, Mr. Speaker, that isn't the case. We have to have a made-in-Alberta solution.

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Barnes: It's no wonder Albertans don't trust this government. The Minister of Transportation has a different story every time he is asked to explain the extra costs for Edmonton's Anthony Henday ring road. First, the minister said that an extra hundred million dollars was needed because "it was only after the final approval was received that the total cost of it was clear." When asked the same question in estimates, the minister said that the additional money was needed because of the vagaries of the weather. To the Premier. Which is it: poor planning, bad weather, or something else entirely?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you about transportation in this province is that we've invested about \$3 billion annually in road projects like the Calgary and the Edmonton ring roads. As a matter of fact, those are great examples of P3 projects, which I know the opposition supports and, one could argue, is taking on debt. That P3 philosophy was started by one of our Premiers, Ralph Klein, who I know they also support.

Mr. Barnes: This government just can't keep its story straight when it comes to public-private partnerships. Given that yesterday the Finance minister said, "The idea is to get the greatest value for the taxpayer both today and in the future," and given that the Minister of Infrastructure admitted the upfront costs of a P3 are higher than a traditional build, how are Albertans getting the best deal when they're paying more today and more in the future with interest payments?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's actually a good question. It kind of caught me a little bit off guard. I would commend the hon. member to take a look at how we deal with net present values, how we figure out what the value is today of something that is stretched out over a 30-year period of time, what the value is of transferring the risk of construction from the taxpayer to the proponents of the actual facility and the agreements that we have in there to maintain that facility for the next 30 years. We are putting the risk on the proponents, not the taxpayers. We are getting great value for taxpayers.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the Infrastructure minister said that every P3 project has been on time and on budget and given that the Transportation minister recently asked for an extra \$100 million for the Henday because, quote, there was a hundred million dollars less approved than was required to complete this P3 project, how does this government expect Albertans to have confidence in P3s when it can't keep its planning in order or its story straight?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, for many of the P3 programs that we do under the contract, there are codicils for whether the weather is working for or against and whether or not there are engineering issues that they may hit. I'm not familiar with the exact circumstances under the hundred million that the hon. member is talking about. I'm sure the Minister of Transportation will be able to provide him with that. He probably did in estimates. We had, as I'll talk about a little bit later, some 70 hours' worth of estimates, where the hon. member had his opportunity.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe I heard the bells ring, so that concludes question period for today. [interjections] You would like to continue question period? [interjections] You know, don't start your celebration too early, okay?

One of the members has requested we revert to introductions briefly. Is anyone opposed to that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, please proceed.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature the hard-working students from Pembina Valley Christian school. They are visiting the Legislature today along with their teacher, Meghan Penner, and parents Dwight Reimer, Mary Reimer, Larry Reimer, Anne Reimer, Roy Friesen, and Shauna Friesen. Would you please give them the warm welcome that they deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Election Anniversaries

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on to Members' Statements and while we still have everyone's attention, I want to draw the public's attention and the colleagues' attention to the special anniversary that is being celebrated today. It is the first election anniversary for a number of members.

I'm going to call their names, ask them to rise, and we can congratulate them all at once. I'll go quickly. The hon. members

from Banff-Cochrane, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-Hawkwood, Calgary-Hays, Calgary-North West, Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-South East, Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-West, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Chestermere-Rocky View, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Drumheller-Stettler, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-South West, Fort McMurray-Conklin, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Grande Prairie-Smoky, Highwood, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, Lacombe-Ponoka, Little Bow, Livingstone-Macleod, Medicine Hat, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Stony Plain, Strathmore-Brooks, and Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Are there any that I've missed? I hope not.

Hon. members, let's congratulate these first-time members. Congratulations. [applause]

In 30 seconds from now the Clerk will call for Members' Statements.

2:50 Members' Statements

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

Polish Veterans' Society

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's truly my honour and privilege to rise today in recognition of the Polish Veterans' Society, which was established on April 11, 1938, and is celebrating their 75th anniversary. I would like to commend the important leadership of the Polish Veterans' Society and all other affiliated Polish organizations in the community for their steadfast support to strengthen, advance, and preserve the cultural, political, and economic contributions so that they remain recognized and cherished across generations. The Polish Veterans' Society truly exemplifies the essence of the Alberta spirit.

Mr. Speaker, Polish settlement began in the Edmonton region in 1895, and in the decades following, like other cultural groups, many of their family histories were brought to Alberta through immigration. I have often said that the future of our province is unwritten, and I am proud to say that through the dedicated leadership of the Polish Veterans' Society a strong foundation was established to lead the way.

The collective accomplishments of this organization and others include the purchase of the first Polish Hall in 1940 and the grand opening in 1960, the construction of the Polish church in 1954, the opening of the Villa Maria sections at the Polish Veterans Hall and senior citizens home in the 1970s in Edmonton-Decore, and the opening of the Wawel Country Lodge in 1995.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure to be included in their wonderful commemorative celebration on April 6, 2013, to help recognize their achievements and those who served in the military. I commend all individuals from the past, present, and those in the future for their contributions to the Polish Veterans' Society. Thank you to all for adding immeasurably to our city, province, and country. My heartfelt admiration for being great Albertans, great Canadians, and just simply a great community of people that I've had the pleasure to work with along my life's journey.

Congratulations and best wishes for continued success in the many years to come. God bless. Thank you.

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

Official Opposition Achievements

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago today Albertans elected the province's largest Official Opposition in a generation. Never before has Alberta seen an Official Opposition so united in purpose and focus on the task we were elected to do. After receiving 34 per cent of the vote in the election a year ago today, we came here to Edmonton with a strong mandate to hold this government to account, and that is precisely what we are doing. Over the last 12 months MLAs on this side of the House have forced the government's hand into making the right decision for Albertans on several occasions. Through dogged determination we've seen backtracks, reversals, retreats, and withdrawals on everything from seniors' care to property rights to justice for victims of crime. Here are just a few of the highlights for the members opposite.

The Education Act. After resisting Wildrose efforts before the election to enshrine parental rights into law, the government finally relented to our much larger Wildrose caucus after the election, recognizing parents as the ultimate decision-makers in their children's education.

Highway 63. The day after our members for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and Cypress-Medicine Hat issued a report calling for a timeline for the twinning, the Transportation minister did exactly that.

Illegal donations. After constant revelations of shady donations and relentless questioning from our side, the members opposite finally gave in, crafting legislation to report all illegal donations publicly.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker: Bill 50 transmission policy, home-cooked meals for seniors, discounted hospital parking for veterans, stronger rules for government expenses, repayment of egregious health expenses, and justice reforms for violent-crime victims. Getting things done for Albertans: that is what an effective Official Opposition looks like. It's what we were sent here to do. It's what we will keep on doing, and we will prove to Albertans that by 2016 we can be trusted with much more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Anniversary of Election

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to rise today to celebrate the first anniversary of this government's election. I remember this day one year ago as being nerve-racking, exciting, and a bit scary. I was so humbled that the people of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock gave me the honour of representing them in this amazing place. I remember thinking that I had such a responsibility to bring our shared values and ambitions to this table. After six months I felt a bit like the information intake was like drinking from a fire hose. Today I still feel so honoured to be here.

Albertans gave us an aggressive mandate. Albertans have told us not to back down in the face of adversity or neglect our most vulnerable just because the times get tough. Albertans have told us to balance fiscal responsibility with the need to build Alberta in good times and bad. That's what we've done, Mr. Speaker. We have had to make some tough decisions in light of our fiscal reality, but we've stuck to our values, and we haven't turned our back on our promises.

We promised Albertans no new taxes, and we've kept that promise. Budget 2013 has committed \$503 million over the next three years for 50 new schools and 70 modernizations. We

promised family care clinics, and we've kept that promise with \$235 million in Budget 2013. We promised to protect vulnerable Albertans, and that's what we're doing by providing over a hundred million dollars for outreach support services, housing, and emergency and/or transitional shelters. We promised Alberta whistle-blower legislation, and we've delivered on that promise. We promised the twinning of highway 63, and Budget 2013 has provided funding to accelerate that twinning. I'm proud to stand in this House and say that we've made promises, and we will continue to deliver on them.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first of a four-year mandate. In order to be thoughtful and thorough and with Albertans' priorities in mind, we will continue the efforts in the years to come. We didn't promise to do it all within the first year. With three years left to do that, we are confident that we will.

Thank you.

St. George's Day

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today millions of people around the world will pay tribute to the Christian martyr St. George. St. George was a Roman soldier who was imprisoned, tortured, and put to death on the orders of Emperor Diocletian for protesting the persecution of Christians. He is believed to have been put to death in Lydda, Palestine, on April 23, 303 AD.

Seventeen centuries later the memory and the spirit of St. George live on. In Canada St. George is perhaps best known as the patron saint of England, but countries such as Belgium, Italy, Malta, Georgia, and Spain also revere St. George as a beacon of courage, strength, and truth. In the 11th century St. George was adopted as the patron saint of soldiers, which is appropriate today when we recognize the bravery and dedication of the men and women who serve in our armed forces and willingly put themselves in danger in service of their country. The flag of the international Red Cross has adopted the cross of St. George as its widely known symbol. Accounts of St. George's life are steeped in myth and legend. We've all heard about the slaying of the dragon. This is possibly an allegory of his struggle against the Roman authorities.

In Alberta we're proud that our provincial flag and our coat of arms prominently display the cross of St. George, which is a perpendicular red martyr's cross on a white background. Three other provincial flags, Mr. Speaker, hanging in this Chamber also prominently feature St. George's cross.

Mr. Speaker, St. George exemplified the values that all hon. members of this House should aspire to: courage, conviction, and dedication to one's belief and causes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2013 Special Olympics Alberta Spring Games

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the 2013 Special Olympics Alberta Spring Games held this past weekend in Red Deer delivered an exciting and unforgettable weekend for over 1,200 athletes, coaches, and volunteers. The opening ceremonies were just as unforgettable. Imagine the excitement of over 800 athletes as the Olympic torchbearers ran into the Lindsay Thurber high school gym holding the torch high above their heads for all to see. All eyes were focused on the runners as they ran through the stunning honour guard made up of eight law enforcement officers from around the province.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Jerry Tennant, the chairman of the Red Deer Special Olympics committee for over 32 years and the chairman of the 2013 Games Organizing Committee, and

his great team of volunteers for organizing and delivering a highly successful 2013 Special Olympics Spring Games. I would also like to thank Karen Saunders, chair of the Special Olympics Alberta Board of Directors, and the provincial board for helping to make this a very successful games.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that there are 1,500 coaches and volunteers in Alberta who work year-round to give people with an intellectual disability the chance to realize their full potential in sports? Of the 18 official Special Olympics sports the Spring Games include five-pin and 10-pin bowling, basketball, and swimming. The winning athletes in these events now have the opportunity to join Team Alberta at the 2014 Special Olympics Canada Summer Games in Vancouver.

3:00

Thank you to the generous sponsors, provincial and local, including the city of Red Deer and the Catholic school board. Thanks to the many volunteers, families, and friends who support the athletes. Congratulations to all the athletes whose team spirit was so great that they cheered for every medal winner regardless of what team they belonged to. You have truly demonstrated the spirit of Alberta, and you have taught us that there is no challenge that can't be overcome. May you always strive to be the very best that you can be.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you wish to address the Assembly briefly?

Mr. Hancock: If you insist, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask for unanimous consent to allow us to move past 3 o'clock and complete the Routine.

The Speaker: Hon. members, may we have unanimous consent, as requested by the Government House Leader, to proceed onward and conclude the Routine?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hearing no objections, let us conclude, then, by proceeding with the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to hear her statement.

Cancer Awareness and Prevention

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll notice, like many other members in the Assembly today and across the aisle and like many guests in the gallery I'm wearing a daffodil pin today. The daffodil is the first flower of spring, and for cancer patients it's a symbol of hope. April is cancer awareness month.

Despite great strides in cancer research and prevention this disease remains one of the gravest diagnoses a patient can receive. This year over 16,000 Albertans will be diagnosed with cancer, and sadly over 6,000 of them will succumb to the disease. These patients will travel a long and life-altering road to recovery. Many of them will survive to see the daffodils bloom again. Too many of them will not.

Cancer awareness month gives us the opportunity to unite under one common goal, eliminating cancer for good. It also gives us the opportunity to remind cancer patients that they're not alone in their journey, that we're right here, that we support them, and that we have them in our minds.

Prevention is the key. Living a tobacco-free lifestyle remains the single most important thing Albertans can do to prevent cancer. Unfortunately, while overall rates of smoking are going down, Alberta's youth continue to use tobacco at an alarming rate. This year over 2,000 Albertans will be diagnosed with lung cancer

and over 1,500 of them will succumb to the disease. Their deaths will be completely preventable. They are our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, and our friends. The Canadian Cancer Society would like to highlight the issue of tobacco use this year. As legislators we must continue to work to discourage young people from using tobacco and encourage all current smokers to kick the habit.

My father has throat cancer from smoking, and he breathes through a hole in his throat. Cancer affected us. It affects everyone. I implore all members to take the opportunity to tell their stories and never miss a chance to speak up about cancer and do our part in the fight against cancer.

Albertans, colleagues, and friends, please join me in wearing a daffodil and add your support to cancer research.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Wednesday, April 17, 2013, and as the chair of the committee I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94. However, the petition of Charles Frederick Barth, chair of the members of the Misericordia hospital for the Misericordia Hospital Amendment Act, 2013, has been withdrawn by the petitioner and will not be proceeding.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a handwritten note – how rare is that in this day and age? – from one of my senior constituents. His name is John Nevakshonoff, and he is one of those people that is currently being provided with medical oxygen by Parkland Respiratory Care. This is an issue that is causing a large number of seniors a great deal of stress because there's quite a bit of scuttlebutt out there about how AHS is going to change around who's delivering this medical oxygen. He's asking me to do what I can to stop this change as I have more power than he does as a senior. I hope that isn't true. I hope he ultimately holds the power in convincing this government to not frighten seniors, as they are doing currently.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Nicola Ramsey from Slave Lake. She has been a teacher at the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. She goes through in dramatic fashion both her role and the effects that the 56 per cent cut to this very important program will have on students in this province.

My second tabling is an online petition to stop the cuts to advanced distance learning. I will do a shout-out to Stacy Harper, who has been very passionate about this issue. I hope she's successful in getting the government's attention on this matter.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll indulge me, I have two tablings today. I'd like to table 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 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 for Albertans and that this PC government is clearly out of touch with its broken-promises budget.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of 46 e-mails we received from Albertans who are extremely worried and upset about this PC government's broken promise to seniors. For example, Richard and Brenda from Sherwood Park write: what Premier Redford is doing to seniors is a disgrace. These e-mails show that the government can't be trusted to protect seniors and other vulnerable citizens of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the requisite number of copies to present three tablings. The first is from Diana Stinn of the Phoenix Foundation, asking for help in understanding the cuts made to private schools in this budget, which she feels is an unfair action.

The second is from Mrs. Shirley Redford, asking for maintenance of the road to a provincial park, the Police Outpost park in my riding.

Finally, then, Ron Bos, Susan Hamel, and two others from the Rehoboth Christian Ministries are concerned about cutting funds to key programs for persons with developmental disabilities. She feels this is going to have a deleterious impact on their lifestyle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I believe that concludes the Routine, but we're going to hear at least one point of order.

If the hon. Member for Airdrie wishes to proceed with a citation and his point of order, I believe you're the only one I have today.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citation is 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically, imputing "false or unavowed motives to another Member" and using "abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder" and introducing a "matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of this Assembly." This issue in question is that the Finance minister specifically listed several projects that he said that the leader of this opposition and this caucus would cut if we were elected, if we were in the government. He specifically noted the Whitecourt hospital, but there were several that he listed. I think that it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that we can't just say things that are flat-out fictitious. It's important that we don't do that. So what I will do in order to help this member is explain for probably the 30th time in here what our capital plan does with regard to that so that he won't, I'm sure, accidentally mislead the public on what that is.

3:10

Clearly, we've said many times that we would take all requested health care projects, education projects, road infrastructure projects and put them into an infrastructure priority list based on

objective criteria. They'd be listed. They'd be in four different envelopes: health, education, road infrastructure, and a fourth, other category. They'd be listed in the order of need based on objective criteria. Those would be published, and then the \$4 billion that we would allocate this year – and it would go up with inflation and population growth – would be allocated to those lists in that order.

Now, unfortunately, we do not have those lists at our disposal because we do not have what the government has access to with all the information that they get that would allow us to prioritize the list properly. We do not have access to that information, nor have we been given it by the government when asked.

Mr. Speaker, clearly it is incorrect for them to say that we would cut any project, because we don't know what's on the list. Now, if they wanted to be able to tell us what we would cut, they could. There's a way out of this. They could themselves publish the infrastructure priority list, and they would say: we would put this much to the infrastructure priority list, and the Wildrose would only put this much to it, and these are the projects that would have to wait an extra year or two years or so forth. They've got that power in their hands to do that, yet they don't do it.

But to say that we're going to cut any specific project is just not true. They've got to publish the list, and then they would be able to tell us what the difference is between what we would spend on infrastructure and what they would spend on infrastructure and how much less or more the capital projects that would be built would be.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that that be clarified because it's very unfair for this member to sit in here and say what we would and would not cut when they will not produce the list that would allow them to truthfully make that claim. One thing that certainly would not be on our list is that \$350 million new MLA Taj Mahal. That would not be on our priority list.

The Speaker: The hon. minister briefly in response.

Mr. Horner: I will try to be brief, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct, and I should apologize for saying which projects they would cut, because with \$2 billion in cuts I'm not exactly sure which projects they would cut. It could be the Whitecourt hospital. It could be any schools in Airdrie. It could be schools in my riding. I don't know. They're promising to pay cash for everything, but they're not telling Albertans where they would cut \$3 billion out of the operating budget that we currently have before us in the House.

I fail to see where this would be a point of order. It's certainly a point of clarification of what we know they won't do. We don't know, Mr. Speaker, because their plan only has numbers in it and then a list of things that actually don't apply. So it's difficult for me to say what they would cut. All I know is that they would cut about two and a half billion dollars' worth of projects that are on our list.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Very briefly, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, please, very briefly.

Mr. Hancock: I just wanted to point out that even in the hon. member's submission he contradicted himself. At one stage he said that one shouldn't speak untruths – I think that's a paraphrase of what he said – and then went on to characterize a project as being MLA offices when he knows full well, or he should know if he had any ability to read at all, that the federal building refurbishing is actually going to house a significant number of

civil servants now currently housed in the Terrace Building and LAO staff currently housed in the Annex. Time after time after time they have talked about the federal building as being expensive MLA offices, which is patently untrue.

The hon. member is once again raising a point of order to try and clarify – and I understand why he'd want to clarify because their positions have been very murky. South Calgary health campus, for example, very clearly was heard to be cancelled during the last campaign by them. Then they changed their position.

This is another circumstance, Mr. Speaker, where they're trying to change their spots. They're trying to hide the things that they don't think the public will accept, and that's not a point of order. That's just an ongoing battle for them because it's so necessary if they want to ever declare any . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've recognized two members from the government side. I'm going to recognize one final one from the Official Opposition side and then make a ruling on this, assuming no one else is baited into this discussion about points of order.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. Of course, I rise today to support the point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j) from the Member for Airdrie. I think it's important to clarify. The hon. Finance minister's question: \$2 billion separation between the Wildrose and the PC. It's actually \$1 billion. He asked to clarify where that would come from. We've talked again and again about corporate subsidies, \$2 billion in corporate subsidies to pump CO₂ into the ground; MLA offices, putting a rooftop garden on a building. These are the types of cuts: not specific priorities for Albertans. I think it's very important that we distinguish the differences in priorities. This party wants to put corporate subsidies above schools. This party wants to put MLA offices above hospitals. We just don't support that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let me ask and hope there are no others who wish to participate in this. I see none, and I'm grateful for that. I'm sure the rest of the members are as well. Thank you.

Hon. members, we've seen so many occasions where, really, points of order start out as a point of order, perhaps, but factually they become points of clarification, which is, I think, what the case is here. You would be very familiar with previous rulings that I and previous Speakers will have made in this regard when we have said there are ample examples of rules and proceedings in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in *Beauchesne's*, and elsewhere that say that frequently you might be asked to accept two versions of the same story or the same incident or the same occasion or the same truth, for that matter, because people do have differing points of view. Nonetheless, it is always refreshing to have those points clarified, and I think they have been amply clarified.

As a result of that, there is no point of order, and we are going to move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2013

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to resist the temptation to utilize some of this time to talk about the budget and some of the things that are in there. I think there have been some 70 hours of debate in estimates, a number of hours last night in going over a number of amendments. You know, under last year's rules there would have only been around 54 hours of debate in estimates, so we've already had some 16 hours more of debate on this budget and the estimates for each of the departments than we would have had if we had used the previous rules.

I know we're going to be getting into the Fiscal Management Act and a number of other things later on, so there will be probably ample opportunity to talk about some of the items that are there.

I think, given the numerous hours of debate, that I'm simply going to suggest that what we have before us is an appropriate Appropriation Act, that it has been debated and questioned over a lengthy period of time. [interjection] And I understand we may have some more.

It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be standing up and speaking in regard to Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013, which, for those following at home, is the budget. We have debated this for some time in estimates and so forth, and we've had a chance for me and the Leader of the Official Opposition as well as the two other opposition party leaders and opposition finance critics to debate this. We certainly haven't had very much time to debate the entirety of the budget, and unfortunately the rules, the standing orders, that we have right now are somewhat limiting with regard to the ability to do that as it can essentially be adjourned until the end of the day and voted on. But here we are.

I think that there are several key issues in this budget, and I'll highlight the major ones. In my view, the first and most important piece that we need to talk about is the fact that this is the back-in-debt budget. Right now, currently, the Alberta government has on its books roughly \$4 billion in debt for infrastructure projects primarily. A lot of that is P3 debt. Some of it is direct borrowing, specifically Alberta bonds and so forth, but it's roughly \$4 billion.

3:20

That does not include any of the liabilities, and there are billions and billions in liabilities, pension liabilities and such, on the books. Not counting all of those things, just your basic debt as most people think of debt, not including lines of credit used for insurance policies and so forth, it's roughly \$4 billion. That's accumulated primarily over the last few years, over the last five or six years. That's \$4 billion too much, in my view, but it's not crushing debt by any stretch. It's something that needs to be paid back. A Wildrose government would certainly do that as quickly as possible, but it's not something that is going to crush our balance sheet, that \$4 billion.

Unfortunately, this government is repeating the exact same mistakes that it did during the Getty years in the late '80s and early '90s. Instead of saying, "Look, we've done this \$4 billion of debt; it was a world financial crisis that occurred, and we needed to do that in order to deal with it and so forth," whatever excuse they wanted to use, "and we're now going to get out of it because we're close to record revenues over the last five years; we're

going to get our act together and stop the borrowing and get back to business as usual, which is paying as we go, living within our means," that's not what this government has chosen to do. This government has chosen to go on a borrowing binge, and that means an additional just under \$4 billion this year in borrowing. It means close to \$17 billion in total borrowing, including the \$4 billion that's already there, that I mentioned earlier, by 2016, by the next time that we in Alberta go to the polls.

I cannot fathom any kind of storybook fantasy that the PCs might come up with wherein the people of Alberta in the last election would have voted for this government, certainly in the numbers that they did, if they had known that the government would be taking out \$17 billion in debt by 2016. They simply would not have supported that. That is why this government did not run on that in their campaign.

Albertans have made it very clear, as the late Premier Klein so perfectly encapsulated in the way he dealt with the debt situation, that they want Alberta's politicians to live within their means. They do not want to go into debt. They do not buy the excuses, the justifications, for going into debt. Mr. Speaker, we have heard from literally thousands of Albertans that are upset with this debt project, this government's plan to debt finance this government for the next three years. They're not happy. Every poll, survey, one-on-one conversation clearly says that an overwhelming number of Albertans from all party lines, whether it be Liberal, New Democrat, PCs, and, of course, Wildrose supporters from the last election, do not in any way, shape, or form support going back into debt. There's a small group that does. There's a small group, 20 to 25 per cent, maybe 30 per cent, that agree that we should debt finance, but the vast majority of Albertans do not agree with that. I have not seen a single shred of empirical evidence to support that.

That's why it's very disconcerting and disheartening to the people of this province after so many – I believe it was 44 per cent – in the last election voted for this PC party partly based on a very important promise that they would live within their means and not go into debt. The Premier said it multiple times. Every minister on that front bench involved in the Finance portfolio said the same thing. They were not going to go into debt. Not only are they breaking that promise; they're blowing it away. Just absolutely. From \$4 billion to \$17 billion in three years. Imagine that.

In 2004 when Ralph held up the paid-in-full sign at the McDougall Centre, who would've thought that just a few years later we'd be sitting here going \$17 billion into debt by 2016? I know for a fact that there are many members of the party opposite, the governing party, that are not happy with this. There are certainly many members on this side that are not happy with this.

We do not all agree on the best way to get out of this mess. The Liberals, obviously, have a fair tax plan. The NDs have a plan to generate more royalty revenue or collect more royalty revenue. We have a plan that spreads out capital over an extra year and cuts bureaucracy, waste, and so forth. The government does not have a plan to get out of this mess. Their plan is to just borrow and borrow and borrow.

So I would urge the members opposite there who do believe in balanced budgets, who do not believe in going into debt, who believe that this is a betrayal of Albertans and the legacy that was forged by Premier Ralph Klein while he was in power and while he was leading this province that they should vote against this bill. They should vote against it out of principle. They should vote against it because it would send the right signal to this government. There's no reason for them to vote for it.

I don't expect the Finance minister to vote against his own budget. I don't think that's going to happen. I don't even expect

anyone from the Executive Council to do so. But there are members over there, who have spoken with other opposition members, who we've heard specifically are absolutely upset with this. Those folks should vote against this, not just toe the party line. Please stand up and be counted. This is not the right path to go down. This is a betrayal of that no-debt legacy that so many Albertans identify with. I would urge us to think about that.

There is a comment that you hear from the Finance minister and Premier and others. They talk about why going into government debt for capital is the same, is similar to the debt that businesses take on when they take a business loan out to buy some equipment or when a family takes a mortgage out to finance a home. This is not a good comparison. It is a huge stretch for many reasons, Mr. Speaker. First of all, when you take out a business loan as a businessperson or when you mortgage a home, take out a mortgage, first of all, you're generally purchasing an asset that will appreciate in value or will create income, and with that income generated and so forth you can pay back the loan.

Government debts are not like that, Mr. Speaker. An asset that is purchased by government is not an appreciating asset; it's a depreciating asset. It's an important asset. It's something that we need to do because these are the public works that we want our people in Alberta to have, our fellow citizens, but a road is not going to increase in value. A school is not going to increase in value, meaning monetary value. It has other value, but the monetary value is not going to increase. So it's very different in that way.

The other difference is that you can sell a house. [interjection] Yeah. I love how the House leader, who was part of that Klein revolution who spoke against debt, who supported the no-debt policy, is now the biggest apologist for the debt policy. It's ridiculous. It's absolutely ridiculous. You can't be inconsistent like that. There was a policy in this government for a decade that said that they were not going to go into debt to finance the operations or anything in government. Now they do. That is inconsistent. It's completely inconsistent. We're the ones over here being consistent with regard to not wanting to take on debt. [interjections]

You know, I don't remember the junior Finance minister saying anything about wanting to go into debt in the last election. I really don't remember him promising that. I certainly don't remember the Finance minister or the House leader or anybody, the Justice minister, any one of them, saying: we are going to go into debt to the tune of \$17 billion or, frankly, to the tune of \$1 to finance our spending. I didn't hear it. If they had campaigned on that, Mr. Speaker, they would not have been elected. It would not have happened. [interjection] You may have. There might have been three or four of you over there. You're a popular guy, Finance minister, in your riding. You might have made it. But I'm telling you that the folks over there that won by a couple of hundred votes – and there are a lot of you – wouldn't have won. I'm telling you right now. It wouldn't have happened.

3:30

I think it's very important that the public understand that, and they have. I think the polling and everything else that you see out there right now is indicative of that betrayal that they feel on that issue and other issues. But the debt issue seems to be certainly a rising issue that people are upset about.

The other difference between mortgage debt and business debt as opposed to government debt is that you cannot take a government asset – you cannot take many government assets, anyway – and sell them on the open market. You can do it with

some, but with the majority you cannot. Again, it's very different that way.

Another difference is that people don't take out a mortgage every single year. They don't take out a mortgage and then take out another mortgage and then the next year take out a mortgage and the next year take out a mortgage. They don't do that. They usually do it once in their lifetime, sometimes twice, but they generally don't take out a mortgage on their home every single year forever. They don't do that. People who have tried that and governments who have tried that – there are governments out there that have tried it. Their names are Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy. What do these have in common? They've all tried it. What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that they go bankrupt. They can't do it after a while. They can't support the cost of the crushing debt. The United States of America: another example of that.

The province of Ontario is in huge trouble right now because that attitude is the attitude they've been going with for the last 20 years, and it's catching up with them now. Many pennies on the dollar, 30, 40 per cent of every dollar they take in in tax collection, are going towards debt finance. That's no way to live. That's no legacy to leave our families and our children in the future.

Again, it's one thing if this was a one-time mortgage or a one-time debt financing, but it's not. They're planning on doing it every single year, certainly till 2016 – we don't know the plans after that – \$4 billion a year. It's not the right thing to do.

One of the other differences, of course, is that governments, when they debt finance, are risking taxpayer money. When we take out a mortgage or an individual business loan, we're risking as individuals our own money. That's the difference. They're risking taxpayer money; we're risking our own when we're talking about the difference between a business loan and a government loan.

So there are many differences between government debt financing and mortgages and so forth that people do on an individual level. I would ask this government to please make sure that as they go forward, they will end this debt financing plan. At the end of this year we'll be \$8 billion in debt. At that point I hope this will be the last year of that. I hope that the government will reassess this policy. After this year, hopefully, you know, the differential is shrunk down to, actually, an historically small amount. Roughly \$15 is the differential.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Anderson: Right now? Is it higher today?

An Hon. Member: It's worse.

Mr. Anderson: Really? A bad day for oil, apparently.

But if it's \$15 to \$20, that's still a reasonable level. It's certainly not as bad as it was earlier in the year. If they can get that money coming back into the coffers, if they can cut and restrain their spending, then perhaps we will not have to borrow as much or at all. I would ask the government, going forward, to make it a priority that when the next budget comes out that it not include debt financing or that it significantly lowers it from the \$4 billion they're planning on next year. We probably can't do anything about it this year, but certainly we can make sure that next year we start digging ourselves out of the hole. I think that's very important.

That is what Albertans voted for. You can say: "Oh, well, they didn't vote for you. They voted for blah, blah, blah." Let's just talk about what Albertans voted for from a policy perspective, not a party perspective, for a second. What they voted for from a

policy perspective, clearly, overwhelmingly – I would say a hundred per cent of them because I didn't see any of the parties run on debt financing. I'm not aware of the Liberals or the NDP running on it either. The Wildrose certainly did not do it, and neither did the PCs. So if a hundred per cent of Albertans voted for parties that did not include debt financing in their election platforms, shouldn't that be what we give Albertans in this House? I would think so. I would think that that's exactly what we should give Albertans in this House.

Again, we can debate how we get there. We can discuss whether that's tax increases, different services decreasing, stretching out the capital plan. Whatever it is, we can have that discussion in here, but nobody can honestly say that they were elected on a platform of \$17 billion in debt by 2016. No one can do that. So a vote for that is a betrayal of the people that checked that box for you in the ballot booth, and it's not right.

We need to be proud of who we are as Albertans when it comes to the legacy of no debt. We are different. We conducted ourselves very differently in the '90s and the early 2000s. Because of that, we have a glorious opportunity, frankly, to be something better, to be the exception in this world, where we see governments crashing and going bankrupt and having all kinds of problems and having to cut programs forever because they can't afford to even pay the interest on their loans. We can be the exception to that. We are now, but if we conduct ourselves as we're doing now, by going into debt to the tune of \$16 billion, a debt ceiling of \$40 billion – and you know how easy it is to raise a debt ceiling. Look at the States. They just keep raising it and raising it and raising it.

If we can get back on track, we have the opportunity to do something spectacular in this province instead of in 20 years from now saying to our kids: "Man, did we ever blow an amazing opportunity because now we're just like everybody else. We can barely pay our bills, and 30 to 40 cents of every dollar we collect in taxes is going to debt financing and debt servicing instead of programs, instead of lower taxes, instead of more infrastructure." Let's not build that. That's not building Alberta's future. That's building regret. That is what that is.

I hope that the members opposite, certainly those not in Executive Council, will vote against this budget and join with the Wildrose and perhaps the other opposition parties, I'm assuming – but I won't speak for them – on voting against a budget that was ill conceived and, with regard to debt financing, is something that simply was not run on in the last election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, 29(2)(a) will be available after the next speaker. I have Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Associate Minister of Finance, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Treasurer referenced the 70 hours of debate that we've had on this budget, and I suppose that in some jurisdictions that might be a big deal – it might be a lot of time – but not in this jurisdiction because we spend so much of our time just trying to find out what's in the darn budget. For some reason this government feels very strongly that it needs to keep its plan under wraps, so we get budget documents in which you look at a page, there are maybe four or five total votes, two or three subvotes under each one of those, and that's it.

There could be tens of millions of dollars spent in the department. We can't tell what the programs are by looking at those budget documents. We can't tell by looking at the business plan what the projects are, how much they're spending on

different programs, how many FTEs are involved in the different programs, what the outcomes-based budgeting is supposed to be producing for those different programs. We can't tell any of that, and that's pretty basic information, Mr. Speaker. That's what I would expect to find in any budget document but, God bless their cotton socks, not this government's.

3:40

This was an increase in the amount of budget time that we had but, in fact, not much of an increase for opposition members. We did manage to negotiate for some budgets that had become very large, like the Ministry of Health, where you've got \$17 billion that gets spent, that you have to spend more than three hours, especially with four different parties, trying to debate that. We did. We were able to allocate more hours to a select few of those ministries and then less time to some other ministries.

That didn't mean that there was more time for the opposition, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, there turned out to be less time for the opposition. The Government House Leader and the opposition House leaders are going to continue to disagree with each other, but frankly I felt tricked. I felt there was an agreement that had been made, and that was not carried through. Did my members get more time to speak? No, they didn't. They got less time to speak than they did last time. Certainly, when we got into some of the prorated, less-time ministries, we had 14 minutes to try and debate, you know, a budget of \$130 million. I mean, really? That's like a million dollars a minute. We don't even know what the programs are because they can't be bothered putting any information in their budget documents.

So, no, 70 hours is not enough to debate this particular government's budget. I've had members of the government admit that, you know, it shouldn't be a big deal, that they should be able to give us lots of information. They can't understand why they're not doing that. The next budget rolls out: less information than the one before.

We're in second reading of the Appropriation Act, for which we've now had a Committee of Supply process except that it wasn't Committee of Supply. It took place in legislative policy committees, in which in some cases a fairly large number of people got to sit in an enclosed, airless room for an extended period of time, with little air circulation and seemingly no temperature control either, to try and hold government ministers accountable through this process.

Now, what was interesting, Mr. Speaker, was that there was absolutely no consistency. Each committee decided on its own, God bless them, that they were going to deal with budget debates in a different way. Actually, what most of them did was decide – I didn't actually hear the decision-making – that they were going to treat budget debates the same way that they were treating their other inquiries, so every committee had a different system of how and in what order the rotation of speakers would go. The end result? Opposition members got less time than they did previously to debate the budget and in some cases significantly less time as we went government member, one of the opposition parties, government member, the Official Opposition, government member.

The government members, who sit beside ministers, had, one presumes – at least, I thought they did, Mr. Speaker, but evidently not – caucus meetings and spoke to one another and communicated this stuff. I expressed my horror and confusion that a smart government must not have been listening to their backbenchers if they cut both the community spirit program and the STEP program, which was going to have such an effect on all of the not-for-profit, public, volunteer sector in Alberta. They

cannot have been listening to their own backbenchers, that are out in the community. It turns out, I guess, that they never asked them, so I'm beginning to understand why the government backbenchers keep saying that they need equal time to opposition members to be able to hold the government to account. Still, they do get to sit in meetings with ministers, they do bump into them in the hallway, and they do socialize with them quite a bit.

I would think they could find a few opportunities in there to be able to discuss the budget aside from using up time which in a parliamentary process and tradition has been significantly allocated to opposition members.

As we look at second reading of this appropriation bill, second reading traditionally is about whether or not you're willing to go with the principle of the bill that is being put before you. Are you going to go with the principle? Yes or no? You can kind of fix it up, tidy it up, address the worst of the problems, you know, in Committee of the Whole, which actually is not particularly available to us with an appropriation act, but that's the way it goes. Can I accept the principle of this? The answer is a big, whopping, uh, no.

Why can't I accept the principle of the budget process that this government has gone through and presents before us? Well, a couple of reasons right off the bat. Do you remember there was a commercial that said in ominous words, "No plan, no plan"? It really upset the government of the day. I always thought it was kind of funny because it was in this deep male voice like a promo for a horror flick or something. Anyway, the truth is that here we are, a new government. Sorry; new term, same government. Same government. Same people sitting on that front bench as were sitting there last time, or maybe they were sitting on the back-bench last time. But no plan. I can't believe that. How could that hokey commercial be right? But it is.

Now, it seems strange in this day of the bitumen bubble for me to be saying: what is your surplus plan? As we keep being told by all the highly paid and highly educated economists in this province, this is a cyclical economy. This government has got to come to terms with that fact, and it has to deal with it in the way we budget for the provision of our services. Our provision of health care, child welfare, assistance for work, culture grants cannot depend on the price of a barrel of oil. We've been told that over and over and over again. So do we have a plan for a surplus? Uh, no. No plan for what we would do with a surplus, and it's coming.

The very first question I heard today came from one of the backbenchers to the Minister of Energy, inquiring ever so slightly about when we would start to get the royalties from when the oil sands projects start kicking at their 25 per cent rate. So far they've been at, I think, 1 per cent during the build of their oil sands projects. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. The money is coming. A lot of money is coming. Do we have a plan? Nope, not that we see in this budget. [interjection] I'm sorry, Minister of Energy?

Mr. Hughes: It's best if you listen to the answer.

Ms Blakeman: I did listen to the answer, actually.

The Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair, please. Minister of Energy, you'll have your chance later.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I did listen to the answer, actually. It doesn't negate the fact that you've got a hunk of money coming, and you're trying to pretend you don't.

So no surplus plan. As far as I can tell, no debt plan. There wasn't a particular cutting plan. To me that would involve priorities. What are your priorities? Well, I keep hearing from this government: our priorities are education and people. What have we got cut in this budget? Education and people. What? Well, then that must not have been their cutting plan because they didn't follow it, or maybe I read it upside down or reversed or through a mirror or something, and saying that you valued people and education was actually the reverse. You know when you read things in a mirror and it comes out kind of upside down and backwards? Maybe it was that. I don't know.

But there was certainly no plan in cutting. I mean, we have heard the priorities of this government. Frankly, I think that in many cases they're the priorities of all of us. But what we got was the wackiest cutting plan I've ever seen, where things maybe should have been up, been protected, where postsecondary is just stomped, where the not-for-profit volunteer sector, which is where, by the way, the safe communities framework or strategy or whatever it was being called – you know, a perfect example.

3:50

Three or four years ago, a big tah-dah. This safe communities program was announced, all this money poured into the not-for-profit volunteer sector: "Go out, my children. Develop programs to make safer communities." Well, I'd really like to see the contract. I would like to see where it was written: by the way, at the end of three years you have to be self-sufficient. My understanding was that those groups were sent out to develop those programs, not to develop a fundraising program to keep themselves going. They are two different activities, and they take up pretty much the same amount of time.

So we had all these groups go out and develop all these great pilot projects, and then there's no money. The Minister of Human Services stands up with a sad look on his face and says: "Oh, my goodness. Did you not understand? These were all pilot programs, and they were all coming to an end. We expect you to be self-sustaining." How? How does this government expect those agencies to be self-sustaining in this day and age, particularly when you consider that the government took \$15 million out of that sector when they axed the community spirit matching donation program?

Groups had to raise not only the same old money but new money above and beyond any kind of money that they had raised through other schemes that they had going, memberships or ticket sales or a brunch fundraiser, whatever. Those didn't count. It has to be above and beyond that. They would get matching funds from the community spirit program. For some little organizations, you know, that \$3,000 and the matching \$3,000: that was it, and it was a big deal.

At the same time as we're telling the human services sector to implement the social policy framework and the safer communities, they're supposed to go out and be self-sustaining now. We cut \$15 million out of that budget and the STEP program. Honestly, are you people crazy? How do you expect people to function that way?

I'm running out of time here, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to look for other opportunities. I have a file folder here of letters and notes and phone call receipts that people have sent me asking me to raise issues from my constituency during this debate. Now, because of the way the debate was structured, I didn't get the opportunity to go to the Seniors debate or other debates and be able to raise their points, so this is where I'm going to get to raise them. It's not optimum because I'm not going to get an answer back from any of the ministers, but it's how I'm going to be able

to put on the record for the government members and ministers to hear what is of concern to constituents in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I look forward to the time when I'm able to do that.

In closing, on the principle of this appropriation bill, am I willing to support the principle of it? No. It shows no planning, no foresight. It's cutting stupidly. There's no way to address the fact that every day every dollar spent by this government in programs and services is being subsidized by the next generation's non-renewable resource revenue. That is, as my colleague calls it, intergenerational theft. I can't support that, and I'm not supporting second reading of this bill.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is now available.

Seeing none, let us move on to the Associate Minister of Finance.

Excuse me. Apologies. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, did I miss your hand signal?

Mr. Hehr: Yeah, to be added to the list.

The Speaker: Okay. You've been added.

Hon. minister, you've been recognized. Speak ahead.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to stand up to talk about a few points that have been brought up during debate. I know the Member for Airdrie would like to spend his time talking about how his party likes to say that this is the back-in-debt budget, somehow referencing that had we gone out and campaigned on having debt on our books, the people of Alberta would not have voted us in a year ago today as the government. However, I do note that I did go out and campaign for building things like the ring roads.

Mr. Saskiw: With debt?

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. P3 is a debt. It's a liability on the government's balance sheet. It's quite outstanding, Mr. Speaker, that they don't even have the most basic financial literacy to understand that a debt or a P3 agreement is a liability on the government's balance sheet and treated the exact same way when it comes to raters and those types of things that will rate our financial position out there in the general public. Yes, I did go out and campaign on that. I did go out and campaign on the schools that this government has built through P3 initiatives. I did go out and campaign on the ring roads.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the question that I have is: did that party actually go out and campaign that the government should have never built these things either? I don't think so. As I've alluded to before, the hon. Member for Airdrie is standing opening up a school that's P3 financed. It's an instrument of debt. A P3 agreement is a debt instrument. There are different debt instruments out there, and that's a debt instrument. What we've done as a government is open it up and allowed ourselves to look at different financial instruments to finance capital projects, which includes P3 projects.

We do know that the way that the debt works with some P3 projects is that the debt is taken out by a private consortium. Because we have a triple-A credit rating, Mr. Speaker, in some circumstances it makes sense for us as the government to take out the debt because it lowers the overall costs of the projects. I mean, this is basic financial management. This is how businesses operate their finances. This is how my wife and I decide what we do with

our money, how we spend it, and how we invest in some of the things that we like to buy.

The gall of the member to stand up and say that this is somehow an affront to the Ralph Klein legacy. Again, realizing that the very basic premise of what we're talking about is liabilities on the government balance sheet, Mr. Speaker, there are different instruments that create those liabilities on the government balance sheet, but at the end of the day they really mean the same thing. In 2002 former Premier Klein said: I want to look at the whole accounting system and the way that we finance capital projects using P3s, public-private partnerships, and find imaginative ways to finance these projects rather than the pay-as-you-go. That is a direct quote from former Premier Klein, who you guys put up there on a pedestal as someone that suggests that the government should never have any liabilities on the balance sheet.

Ms Blakeman: Don't look at me on that one.

Mr. Fawcett: Oh, I'm getting to your comments, hon. member.

You know, the whole premise of why this party is not supporting the budget is frankly built on a house of cards. It is flimsy and doesn't even understand the basic tenets of financial principles, Mr. Speaker.

I want to get to some additional comments on this year's budget. Yes, there were some hard choices made – agreed – not easy choices. Members on this side of the House engaged in those discussions. Like I said, they weren't easy. We knew that there would be some people out there in the public, constituents of ours that would be frustrated by some of these decisions. That's what we campaigned for when we ran, to be the party that was put in the position to have to make some of the tough decisions that you have to make as government. [interjections]

There is a huge distinction between being in government and being in opposition, Mr. Speaker. That huge distinction is that in the opposition you can stand up . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but please could we stop the across-the-bow conversations so that all of us can hear whoever happens to be speaking? Again, let's be reminded. We may not like what one member is saying about a particular issue. We may not agree with what a member may be saying, but they have every right to say it here. As long as they stick within the rules, they will and shall be heard.

The hon. Associate Minister of Finance, please continue.

The rest of you, please be reminded not to interject.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, as I was alluding to, there were a number of tough decisions. When you're on the government side, you have to make those decisions and you have to deal with the consequences of those decisions. When you're in the opposition, you can say whatever you want, but you never have to make a decision. You know, it would be nice to be able to do that on the government side, but we don't have that luxury. But that's what we campaigned for, and we're not making excuses.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that when we make these decisions, we make them based on the premise that just because we've done something in the past, it doesn't mean that it should go on forever and ever and ever.

Part of what you do in governing is that you reallocate resources. You look at what you're doing. You try to maximize the

value that you get from the money that you do have with the outcomes that you get for Albertans.

4:00

When you come into this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis – I think that if the average Alberta came in here, they'd be appalled at the disconnect between what happens here and what's going on outside in our communities. We are leading the country in economic growth. We are the envy of the country when it comes to economic growth. Do we have some challenges? Certainly we do.

We've seen a study that indicates that when it comes to ranking the top 200 cities in this country, six of the top 11 are right here in Alberta. This is considering facts like employment, affordability, access to amenities, transportation, all of these things. Six of the top 11, right across the country, are right here in Alberta. We had a study that came out that ranked hospitals. Four of the top 10 are right here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

At the end of the day a budget is not an end in itself. It's a means to an end. It's a means to create prosperity and quality of life for the citizens that put us here. That's what this government has done a very good job of for the last 41 years. It's a vision that our Premier has clearly articulated, and it's why a year ago Albertans put this Progressive Conservative government on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker. This budget is the means to that end. It's not an end in itself.

The results speak for themselves. We have a great place to live. That's the disconnect that Albertans would not understand if they came and visited. If they came and visited this Chamber, they would think the sky was falling. But guess what? We have a bright future here in this province, Mr. Speaker. People are investing in this province like they're not investing anywhere else in this country. Therefore, shouldn't the government also want to invest in its own citizens, in its own province? That's what this budget does.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre first, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I have a question under 29(2)(a) for the Associate Minister of Finance. He talked about disconnect and the Alberta public coming in here and looking at the disconnect. He sees a different disconnect than I do because what I'm hearing from people is the disconnect between the government and the choices they make and how it affects the people in Alberta.

Here's a disconnect that I don't understand. How could this province have so much money, so many resources, so much opportunity, so many possibilities, a great employment rate, a great credit rating, well-educated people, a prepared workforce, and a government that has run a debt year after year after year? This place, this province, is literally paved in gold. How does this government manage to get into debt?

Don't give me the bitumen bubble stuff because that lasted for – what? – exactly two weeks, and we were out of that one. I'm sorry. I wish I could give you permission to use it, but all of the economists have just dismissed it and have moved on now.

That's the disconnect they see, and that's the question I get asked. How could we have so much here, so many natural resources, and have a government that is so much in debt that they are cutting services to vulnerable people? That's the question I'd like you to answer.

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think those are some very good questions. What I would suggest is that one of the reasons why we do have a bit of a disconnect there is that, you know, we have for so long in this province really relied on what I would consider may be excess revenues from the oil and gas sector, that we realize we're just not going to have in the long term. What that has meant is that we've had to make some tough decisions.

I don't make any apologies for having the best paid doctors and the best paid teachers in this province. They earn their money, and we should support them. How much better paid than the rest of the country? That is the question, and this goes on and on and on. We should always ask ourselves some questions. That's our job as governors, to ask ourselves some questions as to what we're currently doing and how we're currently allocating resources, whether it's an efficient and effective use of money and whether it aligns with what else is going on out there. We have had to make the decisions, and this government stands up for the decisions that we've made in this budget as the right ones moving forward.

We also recognize that for many groups – many groups – out there this is change for them. This does signal a new direction that we want to take, keeping in mind that at the end it's about achieving outcomes. It's not about how much money we spend.

Mr. Speaker, I will say this. One of the reasons I got into public life, whether it be as a school board trustee before I was elected as an MLA or whether it's my time in running as an MLA and seeking my candidacy there, is that I've always been frustrated that public policy always centres around how much money you spend on a particular thing. Granted, that has a huge impact on the outcomes that you get, but typically sometimes what happens is that we invest money in things that are outdated, whether it's technology or a service program or program delivery models. It doesn't really matter how much money you invest. You can keep on investing and investing and investing, but you're not going to improve outcomes. That's what this government is focusing on, not on how much money we're spending but on the outcomes we're getting for our money.

The Speaker: Thirty seconds, hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, very quickly, I was wondering if the hon. member could comment on all of the municipalities that we actually borrow for and on-lend to, if he believes that that is giving good value for taxpayers' dollars as well.

Mr. Fawcett: Well, I do think that it is getting good value for taxpayers' money. The reason, Mr. Speaker, is that in Alberta we are a land of hope and opportunity, and people want to come here. They bring their skills, their creativity, their passions. They don't bring their infrastructure, and that's what we need to build for them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm going to do my best to go opposition member, government member, and so on in the exchanges that follow.

I have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the Minister of Justice, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel compelled to rise to speak to this bill and to speak in opposition for some very, very clear reasons, but first I just want to clarify that I know the hon. minister had claimed that there were 70 hours in

estimates for debate. However, we need to clarify the word "debate" because in estimates it is not a debate. It's an opportunity to ask a few questions. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, in this year's structure the smaller opposition parties were stifled even further than they have been in the past. It's quite absurd that in a five-hour block of debate 30 minutes is allocated to an opposition party to question millions if not billions of dollars in spending.

First and foremost, the Premier and this PC government made many promises to Albertans in the last election, and this budget breaks most of those promises to students, to families, to seniors, to communities, and to the most vulnerable Albertans. It's interesting to point out and shameful that this budget contains the most significant cuts of the last 20 years.

I want to start with the fact that many Albertans have been asking me: why is this PC government presenting a recession-style budget? When they look around – and the seven different cities that I and my caucus toured all said this – the economy is looking very healthy, it's in a growth phase, and there's a significant amount of work. Yet Albertans are forced to swallow this austerity budget, which seems a little ridiculous considering that, as the associate minister just stood up and said, Alberta is in a period of growth and we have a healthy economy. It begs the question: why are services that Albertans depend on – again, I'll go through the specifics shortly – having to face cuts and having to stop delivering a lot of programs?

4:10

My frustration and what Albertans are saying to me is: why isn't this government addressing the revenue side? First of all, let's start with cleaning up the mismanagement of dollars. Let's address the issue of high salaries for senior executives, which seem to have spiralled out of control, in addition to the absurd expense accounts that most Albertans could only ever dream of.

Then moving to the issue of royalties, again, you know, I can appreciate that our oil sands are more unique than many of the other oil-producing regions from the fact that we have very little sweet light crude left, and it's a different process, and it's more expensive to extract and refine bitumen. However, it needs to be noted that we have the lowest royalty rate in North America. The fact of the matter is that our province, this government, could easily raise our rates to a level competitive with other jurisdictions. Companies aren't going anywhere. I mean, the reserves are here in Alberta, so charging a fair share for the resource, that belongs to all Albertans, is just common sense and practical.

Second of all, you know, during the election, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans spoke out and said: why aren't we refining and upgrading more of our product in Alberta? Why is this government content and intent on shipping jobs down to the United States, to other jurisdictions when we should be adding value to our product, which would increase what we bring in on the market and keep those quality, long-term jobs in Alberta and ensure that Alberta is prosperous for the long term?

As well, the fact of the matter is that this government talks about lowering the corporate tax rate even lower than it already is. Sadly, it went from 16 per cent down to 10 per cent, and we are failing to collect billions of dollars' worth of taxes between our flat-tax system and our extremely low rate of corporate tax. Again, raising our corporate taxes even by a small amount, by 1 or 2 per cent, would keep us competitive yet bring in billions of dollars in much-needed revenue.

In addition to that, the government could be doing things like closing the corporate tax loopholes, eliminating corporate welfare. The fact that you've got, you know, multinational corporations

that are still getting subsidies even though they're turning record profits seems absurd. Alberta's NDP would have passed those savings on to small and medium-sized businesses, the real economic drivers of this province.

It's a great frustration that the revenue side of this budget has not been addressed. This government is determined to pass this burden onto the backs of today's Alberta families, to middle-income earners as opposed to ensuring that everyone pays their fair share. It begs the question: what will it take for this PC government to listen to Albertans? We've already seen many rallies and protests. We've seen pharmacists protesting. Seniors are up in arms. Families with persons with developmental disabilities are very upset with this government. Families who have relatives in the Michener Centre are quite upset. There is complete uncertainty in the nonprofit and voluntary sector, which has caused some great alarm and frustration.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate. With the limitation that this government insists on imposing on the opposition to having genuine debate and discussion on a budget where they're planning to spend \$40 billion, I think there needs to be more debate and more opportunity for members to discuss this.

Getting back to this budget, completely laden with broken promises, I'll break this down by ministry. In our Health ministry there was a promise during the election to build thousands more long-term care beds, and the delivery is maybe 30 at best. There was a promise or a commitment to address the emergency room wait times, and the fact is that those are growing as opposed to shrinking. There was a commitment to hire more nurses. If you look at the cuts to PDD, I believe it's around \$40 million, again this government clearly picking on vulnerable Albertans.

There was an outcry, as we've seen, as far as folks working in EMS and the ambulance emergency services that there's great frustration. There aren't enough resources being put into ensuring that the folks on the front line can do the job that they want to do, and this government has no excuse but to say: "Well, I'm sorry. We broke another promise."

We look at the environment. Regardless of the PR job that this government is insisting on doing, they're spending thousands or millions of dollars on trying to sell the product as opposed to bringing in some legislation to ensure that we're doing more to combat climate change, that they're even in fact meeting their own climate change targets. However, there needs to be more of a discussion between intensity versus hard caps.

You know, the government has failed to protect our water and get rid of our water markets. I mean, it's frustrating as well. Albertans have indicated that it seems ridiculous the money that this government insists on putting into carbon capture and storage as opposed to really tackling the challenges that are facing our province and our world today.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

A broken promise to diversify the economy. Again, this government should be a lot more proactive than they are, cutting down and ensuring that there are tools in place to minimize the booms and busts of this economy. Again, we look at the fact that our taxes are not at the level that they should be to ensure that you have stable revenues coming into the government coffers as opposed to being reliant on the price of oil.

Regarding our Education department the fact that the AISI funding was eliminated has severely hurt many schools and school districts. There are many teachers and parents and families that don't quite understand how this government has increased funding to private schools yet cut funding to the public system and is

really posing more of a block, if you will, as far as teachers wanting to deliver the highest quality of education. When there aren't resources that are put into the classroom, it stifles the ability of teachers to teach, and it affects children and their families and affects this province in the long term. There are many teachers that I've spoken with who are quite frustrated with the cuts that this government is putting forward in the area of education.

As well, failure to introduce full-day kindergarten, which was a promise that was delivered I believe when the Premier was running for her leadership of the PC Party. Again, all that they can say is: well, maybe it will come one day.

You know, unfortunately, it's this kind of behaviour, where a government promises one thing and fails to deliver, that really frustrates Albertans. It also tarnishes, I think, politicians and gives people a sense that: well, if they don't have to keep their promise, then how is that fair to us?

4:20

We look at Human Services. Specifically, \$42 million was cut from the community access supports for persons with developmental disabilities. We've had no adequate explanation for this cut whatsoever. Again, when we look at the slight increase that Human Services has gotten, there are still programs and areas that have been significantly reduced.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The elimination of the STEP program affected many, many Albertans. In fact, this was a program that many Albertans were proud of. Many of them got their first start in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. In sectors of our society that might struggle to create positions, the STEP program helped them do that, so it didn't just benefit the students by giving them real, meaningful experience. I know the minister has popped up and said: "Well, you know, they can get a job. Our job rate is fantastic." Well, you know what? We actually value civil society and the work that the nonprofit and voluntary sector does, and it's in those areas where, if we want our postsecondary and young people to get experience in those areas, we need to create those opportunities as opposed to taking them away.

We look at advanced education and the fact that there have been 11 per cent cuts to the postsecondary system. We've seen the elimination of many different programs. There have already been increases to student fees, so again a promise that this government made that they would freeze tuition was a promise made of hot air. Clearly, there are postsecondary institutions that are going to put these cuts onto the backs of students through noninstructional fees. We've had the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary and university boards and presidents and students all band together to say that the plan for advanced education is clearly unacceptable and that it's going to come at the expense of students and the reputation of Alberta's postsecondary system.

When we look at seniors, again, revelations yesterday show that the Premier promised to maintain universal drug coverage for seniors. Well, clearly, that was yet another broken promise. She's implementing a new plan that will see \$180 million cut from the seniors' drug benefit. I know my office has letters and e-mails coming in daily from seniors very concerned about these cuts.

Increasing property taxes for senior homeowners with this dubious new deferral program: that will ultimately cost seniors more. We've got a reduction in the eligibility for the seniors' benefit, including removing the WCB and CPP disability income exemptions, which is going to mean that at the end of the day seniors are going to pay more. It's with great frustration that there's a lack of respect for the folks who helped build this

province, who helped make Alberta as strong as it is, and this government clearly has no problems, no qualms about throwing them under the bus, again targeting seniors who have been injured or disabled.

We look at broken promises to many of the cities and municipalities. When we look at MSI funding, in the business plan it had called for \$1.05 billion in the 2013-14 budget for MSI, and the government failed to deliver that. Cities and municipalities . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available, and I see Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills wanting to participate. Go ahead.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just wondering if the hon. member could expand upon some of the principles that he was outlining.

Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I appreciate the question, and I'd very much like to continue.

You know, it's with frustration that in the estimates there may be programs that are cut from one area, but the reality is that if we're looking at, let's say, municipalities, there were many different cuts that they faced, not just from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. When we look at, again, the STEP program, that affects many communities and many community leagues within the city of Edmonton, which was a cut. We look at the fact that the community spirit grant was completely eliminated. For many organizations this has been a double blow because the loss of the STEP program in combination with the elimination of the community spirit program is severely hurting many organizations, and they're not sure how they're going to be able to offer the programs and services that many Albertans have come to rely on.

The safe communities initiative. You know, it bewilders me, to be honest, Mr. Speaker, how this government doesn't value proactive measures and anything that's preventative. When we look at the safe communities initiative, the feedback from the communities was that it was working very well. You had community organizations partnering with different policing services to create programs that were relevant to the local community that they served. You know, I'm sure the minister will jump up and say that this was a three-year grant or a time-allocated type of program, but it's clear that these programs do serve a great need. When they go into a community, people learn about them, they take a while to get off the ground, and then suddenly they're yanked. So it's with great frustration that the safe communities initiative has literally been decimated.

As well, a broken promise that's going to affect many young people throughout the province is that the grants that were promised by this Premier and this government for aboriginal and rural students are nonexistent in this budget. I just want to point out the fact, Mr. Speaker, that aboriginal and rural students are grossly underrepresented in our postsecondary institutions. This was a promise that should have been kept.

You know, again, all of these broken promises that have been listed here by us today and many others are more than disheartening. Again, Albertans are scratching their heads wondering how we can be in the wealthiest province in the country, at a time when our economy is healthy and strong, yet this government is imposing cuts and pushing those cuts onto the backs of students, of seniors, of middle-income families and communities. Really, there's no reason for it, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a great province to live in. I think that there's lots of potential, but this budget is actually doing the opposite. It's taking away opportunities from

Albertans, and it's taking us back a number of steps as opposed to forward.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, and all the reasons that I've outlined, I cannot support the Appropriation Act and have felt compelled to speak out on behalf of Albertans everywhere who feel disenfranchised and are disillusioned with this government and who, to be quite honest, are quite frustrated with one broken promise after another.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any others under 29(2)(a)? Okay. I don't see any.

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Speaker: Before we move on to the next speaker, could I just ask you out of courtesy, hon. members, to review what 29(2)(a) is really all about? With no specific reference to the previous speaker or speakers or to previous discussions or debate, here it is. It says:

- (2)(a) Subject to clause (b), following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

Just bear that in mind, hon. members.

I have no big issue with this, but 29(2)(a) really should be used more for questions pertaining to comments just made as opposed to sometimes doing what we've all done, and that is to allow the member to stand up and complete their speech and so on. That is in order, but Standing Order 29(2)(a) is really meant to be more of an exchange between members rather than that. So please keep that in mind. Again, no admonishment, just a reminder of what the original purpose was and what 29(2)(a) really stands for and how it's described in our own orders.

Ms Blakeman: Under Standing Order 13(2), Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the Speaker to explain his comments because I'm not sure what he was trying to tell us to do or not do. We have long had an exchange in this House where one member may ask another to expand on what they were saying or to make a statement or a comment. Indeed, in a number of cases individuals have actually used the entire five minutes to make their own comment, and it does allow for that under 2(a), where it says: "to allow Members to ask questions and comment."

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, that's just exactly what I said: no admonishment, just a reminder of what the original purpose was. If you read *Hansard*, the little exchange there, you'll perhaps have a similar opinion. No admonishment whatsoever, simply a reminder of what the true purpose of 29(2)(a) really was.

With that, that matter has been clarified. Please have a seat, hon. member, and we'll move on to the hon. Minister of Justice. Thank you for your co-operation and understanding, members.

You have the floor, hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move to adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Fraser	Luan
Amery	Fritz	McDonald
Bhullar	Goudreau	McQueen
Brown	Hancock	Oberle
Calahasen	Horner	Olesen
Cao	Hughes	Pastoor
Casey	Jablonski	Rodney
Cusanelli	Jansen	Scott
Dallas	Johnson, L.	Starke
DeLong	Kennedy-Glans	VanderBurg
Denis	Kubinec	Webber
Drysdale	Leskiw	Woo-Paw
Fawcett		

Against the motion:

Anglin	Hehr	Rowe
Bikman	Kang	Saskiw
Bilous	Mason	Stier
Blakeman	Notley	Towle
Fox	Pedersen	Wilson
Hale		

Totals: For – 37 Against – 16

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Bilous: Point of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You wish to raise a point of privilege?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do.

The Speaker: There is a process for doing that, hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is the first opportunity for me to raise this point, so with your guidance I would like to raise this point of privilege. Seeing as this is my first, I hope that you can direct me on this.

The Speaker: Well, I mean, a point of privilege can be in order, and if you wish to proceed and outline the basics of it, please proceed, then.

Privilege Opportunity for Debate

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pursuing a point of privilege under Standing Order 15. I'm pursuing this point of privilege on the grounds that my ability and that of all opposition members to participate fully and fairly in debate around Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2013, has and will be unjustifiably hindered by the actions of this government and therefore infringe on my privileges as an opposition member.

Mr. Speaker, there is no more important function for an opposition MLA than to hold the government accountable on issues of public expenditure. Please allow me to explain the nefarious nature of what the government is trying to accomplish and then touch on the matter as it regards a question of privilege. The government has just moved to adjourn debate on Bill 20 until late this evening. I am arguing that this government is implementing a strategy to prevent any opportunity for the opposition to debate Bill 20 by using its majority to abuse the intent and spirit of

Standing Order 64(1)(b) and Standing Order 64(3), as has been done in the past by this PC government, if the government plans to adjourn debate until 15 minutes before the normal adjournment hour of 10:30 p.m. as outlined in Standing Order 64(1)(b).

At that time Standing Order 64(3) requires that the Speaker interrupt normal proceedings and put the question on every appropriation bill then standing on the Order Paper for second reading.

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you. Please have a seat for a moment.

Hon. members, what's happened here just now is that we've had an adjournment of a motion. That motion could come back in five minutes. It could come back this evening. It could come back later. We don't know. Just like you said, hon. member that just spoke, if it is the government's intention to do something, I don't know what the government's intention is. I don't know that you know what it is. So you might want to wait until the appropriate time, when we find out what the government's action actually is or has been, before you proceed onwards.

If you have a few more comments you wish to offer in light of what I've just said, then please feel free.

Mr. Bilous: I would like to continue, Mr. Speaker.

By using its majority to adjourn debate until what is essentially the last minute for debate, the government will effectively prevent any opposition member from having the opportunity to debate Bill 20, thus robbing them of their voice in this Legislature and their duty to hold the government accountable on issues of public expenditure.

I'd like to remind the House, Mr. Speaker, that this is exactly what this PC government has done in the past. This is a tried-and-true method which has been used by this government. It's with this history in mind that I feel confident in the belief that this will occur again today. With this in mind, I'm submitting that this is the first opportunity for me to raise this point of privilege in the Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you. Have a seat, please.

I don't see that anything has yet been violated that would result in a point of privilege motion being entertained at this stage. You may feel differently after we know what the government has in fact done, but at this stage I'm not prepared to entertain any significant amount of debate on this.

I will recognize Edmonton-Centre briefly. If you can be very brief so I don't have to cut you off, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Two questions to the Speaker under 13(2). Is the damage not done if the government does decide to follow its precedents from the last five years of bringing appropriation bills back 15 minutes before the normal hour of adjournment and having them voted then, thereby taking away the opportunity of members to speak? If they do that, then the damage is done, is it not? Members who wish to speak in second reading, indeed who are here now, who came in to speak in second reading – and we understand that when it's voted tonight, it's gone. People who wanted to speak in second reading are here and have indicated they wanted to speak, and now they're not going to be allowed to. If precedent is followed, they won't be allowed to tonight.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. member, I'll tell you exactly what I just told the previous member. I have no knowledge of what the government's intention is after this motion of adjournment. All I know is that so far this particular bill, Bill 20, which I know has had some previous

debate in various committees, is now the subject of adjournment. As a result, no violation has occurred as of this stage, so there's no point in raising a point of privilege right now because there's no basis for it yet. You may feel differently later. The hon. member who first raised it may feel differently later. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you may be exactly correct, or you could be exactly wrong. We'll just have to wait and see.

Thank you.

Hon. members, let's move on.

Bill 15 Emergency 911 Act

[Adjourned debate April 18: Mr. Weadick]

The Speaker: I believe the hon. Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs has already moved this.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a fairly – sorry; I jumped in front of the Official Opposition.

An Hon. Member: Have at 'er.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. All right, I'll just keep going, then.

This is a fairly straightforward, administrative type of bill in that the world changes, and we have to adapt legislation to grasp that and to keep up with it sometimes. We had a situation where the costs of operating a 911 call were essentially covered by a minimal charge that was added to everyone's land line because at one point in time everyone had a land line. Remember those? Some people will in this Chamber, and some people won't. I look at my young staff, and frankly two out of three of them don't have a land line anymore. They have a cellphone. Well, you know, we're a good province, so we want to offer the 911 service to people with cellphones, but we still have to pay for it. So how are we supposed to pay for it if, in fact, we're not able to put that small charge on land lines because people are having fewer land lines?

4:50

This bill is seeking to generate revenue to be able to pay for those 911 centres, and I agree. One, I think it's responsible that in this case it's essentially a user-pay system. I mean, somebody that doesn't use a phone at all and uses the mail or walks somewhere: they're not going to end up paying part of this. If they end up borrowing someone's phone or using a telephone booth or a free phone in a doctor's office or something, they're not going to end up paying the cost of the 911. But for most of us this is how we're now going to pay for this service.

It's also going to allow new technologies to be integrated that would allow for things like text messaging and – tah-dah; wait for it – GPS, which I'll just remind everybody you can turn off on your cellphone so that the little people can't tell where you are every second of every day. You can turn that function off, and I recommend you do turn that function off because, frankly, it's nobody's business where you are. Nonetheless, it does allow GPS functions to be rolled into this.

Is this an onerous amount of money that's been put forward? No. Can I even compare it to a cup of coffee? No. I actually think it's less than the price of those little creamers, you know, the flavoured ones that you can buy at the 7-Eleven. They're charging, like, 50 cents for those now, right? [interjection] If you buy the coffee, you don't have to pay for the creamer. Help me out here,

minister. I'm just trying to give people an example that this is not an onerous amount of money.

I think you're paying about 50 cents for the little creamer, the ones that are, you know, hazelnut and other weird things that some people do to coffee, those little creamers you can buy, that are actually an edible oil product. God bless Alberta: our bitumen in a little cup with flavours in it.

Mr. Denis: Different kind of oil.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, a different kind of oil. I'm so sorry.

So about 50 cents. The charge they're going to put on your cellphone bill or your land line – they've been charging your land line anyway – is 44 cents. So I would argue that this is not an overwhelming amount of money. I represent a number of people who are extremely low income. They would match any definition of poverty that you want to come up with, whether it's the low-income cut-off or a market-basket assessment or any of the other ones that people use nowadays. I've got a lot of low-income people and a lot of people on government assistance programs, and they are exceptionally good budgeters.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

I know that when things like the telephone bill itself went up – I mean, at one point it was around \$23. Then it started to creep up, and it got to \$30. I think it's over \$30 now for a land line. Well, that extra 10 bucks a month did make a difference to some of my seniors. That's not going to affect any of us in here, but to people that were, you know, trying to manage on under a thousand dollars, 10 bucks made a difference. But I really don't think the 44 cents is going to make a difference here. So where I would usually be stepping up and saying, "Ooh. I don't know. I'm not happy about that," I can defend this to my constituents, that this is a reasonable charge for a very good service. This charge is expected to generate about \$8 million. I'm getting this from page 28 of the government's operational plan for the business plan for 2013-2016.

This bill makes perfect sense to me. You know, it's not hiding anything. Nothing is sneaking through here. They're just doing what they should be doing, and that's kind of moving ahead with things and recognizing that technology has changed, and they are trying to continue to offer a service that we all value very much.

They will also be trying to deal with pocket calls. You know, I love my phone, but when I got my new phone, it had a feature right on the outside of the lock-off where you could hit it and it would dial emergency numbers. Oh, my God. I must have pocket-called 911 five times. You feel so bad because you're thinking: "Oh, my God. They have to follow up on those calls." They had to phone and make sure that I hadn't, you know, fallen in a ditch and that's why my pocket was calling them. Sure enough, you go, "Oh, my God," and you shut it off, and then they phone you and say: are you all right? You think: I'm so sorry I just wasted your time and money; that's really quite unforgivable. Having that function outside the lock-off – so even though the phone was locked off, you could still hit the face of it, and it would dial – just killed me. Eventually I had to go to a younger person and get them to get rid of that feature. So I would have to unlock my phone and put in the pass code in order to dial 911. I'll have to remember that if I ever get into serious trouble. It's going to take me a while to dial that password to be able to hit the keypad and dial 911, but it's totally worth it because, oh my goodness, I felt just horrible about pocket-dialing the 911 centre.

They are trying – I'm sorry; I'm just trying to remember what the heck they were going to do in here. It says in section 8, "No

person shall make a frivolous or vexatious 911 call." I wouldn't have deemed what I was doing frivolous or vexatious. I would have deemed it embarrassing and stupid, but not frivolous or vexatious. There are fines involved: for a first offence, not more than \$5,000; for a subsequent offence for frivolous or vexatious 911 calls, not more than \$10,000. I think a lot of what they're trying to deal with here is people that phone up and say, "Can you give me the number of the nearest pizza place?" or "Can you call me a cab?" Honest to goodness, people do this. I've got some pages that are smiling at me, going: "Yeah. Right. That doesn't happen." Yeah, it does, unfortunately.

It's a wonderful thing for me to be able to get up and say: "You know what? I think the government did a pretty good job on this." There's nothing fancy. It's just straight-ahead legislation. They're trying to deal with the realities of the time. They have added in the vexatious and frivolous calls and added in the fines. I don't quite know how they're going to manage to get as far as an offence on that one because it's usually going to have to be tracking somebody down and then actually charging them in some sort of court process in order to fine them, but maybe there's an administrative process that I'm missing here.

As usual, the government's list of things that they can make regulations on behind closed doors is almost longer than the rest of the bill, which I still find problematic. Yes, indeed. The regulations that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make starts at the top of page 5 and goes to the top of page 7. This is the stuff that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is the cabinet, does behind closed doors. We never get any input in it. Based on what I'm seeing and hearing, I don't think the government backbenchers are getting any input into this stuff anymore either. It's problematic. I think this should be a more open process. I don't get what the big secrecy is about regulations. If they're going to be public in the end anyway, what's the problem? But, you know, once you get into that secrecy habit, it seems to be very hard for this government to kick that. It's like an addiction.

5:00

I'm happy to support this bill on behalf of my colleagues. There are a couple of questions that we were going to put on the record. In families with multiple cellphones, especially when those beloved companies make it so easy – you know, all the commercials where dad gets a phone, mom gets a phone, three kids all get phones, and they're looking at the dog like he might want one – I think they're all going to have to pay, but I'll ask the minister to follow up on that one. Even then, at 44 cents a phone I don't know that I would be really exercised about that, but I'll put the question on the record.

The money that is collected is for the ongoing service that is being offered. I just want to make sure that we are not stockpiling this anywhere and that we're not, you know, building this up, that it isn't just a one-time-only switch to technology and then we start collecting a slush fund there. According to my understanding of it it's the ongoing support of the 911 system, but I'll just double-check that.

One of the issues that has been raised with me is the lack of good reception for cellphone users in rural Alberta, that they are going to get charged for something that they may not be able to get. I know that when I go up to my cabin, there's probably a 10-mile stretch in there, including my cabin, where you can't get cellphone coverage for love nor money. So I'm paying 44 cents for no cellphone coverage up there. I think that is more of a problem, and I'd like to know how the government is going to handle that one. I think people in rural areas where they're not getting good

coverage or any coverage have a right to complain about that. What's the plan there to handle that one?

What is the criteria for the operators to be able to decide whether it's a frivolous call or not?

I'll put those on the record for the sponsor of the bill to be able to answer when he can.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 15, the Emergency 911 Act. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the Municipal Affairs critic for the Wildrose Official Opposition I rise tonight to add my voice to the discussion on Bill 15, the Emergency 911 Act. Let me begin by saying that I am supportive of Bill 15. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties have also lent their support to this legislation. In fact, our municipalities asked for this legislation. It is often noted that municipal officials are the order of government closest to the people, so when they tell us something, we should perhaps listen. I agree with the AUMA and the AAMD and C that the 911 call and dispatch centres in our communities need some assistance to help pay for their maintenance and their upkeep.

It's no secret that use of land-line telephones is decreasing, but it might come as a surprise to some that while land-line users continue to pay 44 cents a month on their phone bills, funding that is sent directly to the 911 call centres, Albertans who use cell-phones do not pay this levy. Bill 15 will allow the government to enact regulations to ensure that people who use cellphones as well as people who use land-line phones will all pay the same monthly fee that will flow through 911 call centres. The increased funding to 911 call and dispatch centres will allow them to upgrade services, technology, and equipment, something all Albertans will benefit from.

Another important aspect of Bill 15 is that it will extend liability protection to all employees of 911 call and dispatch centres as well as the employees of telecommunications companies involved in 911. Liability protection is often referred to as good Samaritan protection, and I think it is important that all the men and women who do their best every day through their work with 911 be afforded this protection. I can also tell you as a past municipal councillor, mayor, and a member of the AUMA that providing this liability protection for call centres, especially in rural communities, will go a long way towards ensuring that the 911 service can continue to be provided at the local level.

I am supportive of the proposal in Bill 15 to bring in regulations for standards of both service and equipment at 911 centres. Setting basic parameters is needed to ensure that all Albertans, no matter where they live, receive the same service and procedures when they call 911 and, likewise, to ensure that equipment in all call and dispatch centres in Alberta, no matter where they are located, meets a basic standard that will increase public safety.

There are a couple of things I am concerned about, and I know that the government will say that these things will be dealt with when the regulations are developed. However, that is also concerning as we are being asked to pass legislation without having a clear picture of the end product. I sincerely hope these concerns will be addressed before Bill 15 is finally passed.

My greatest concern is centred around how the funding formula will be determined. If mobile phone users start to pay the same monthly levy that land-line phone users pay, how will this funding flow through to each of the 22 call centres in Alberta? If the

formula is based on population alone, major centres will receive the bulk of the funding. This will leave rural centres lacking the funds for newer technology and other upgrades and could force some 911 service amalgamations. This would result in a decrease in local service delivery, something I think is the actual opposite of the intent of this legislation. I would ask the minister to provide some feedback on this aspect while Bill 15 is still on the floor of the Legislature and also to work with and really listen to what the municipalities with call centres suggest is the fairest formula.

I look forward to hearing the comments from other members regarding Bill 15. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Please keep in mind the intention of the standing order, as was addressed by our Speaker just recently.

Seeing none, we'll move on to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Emergency 911 Act. You know, I just want to begin by saying that I've always during the election and even before the election, when I was campaigning, prided myself on being able to give the government credit where credit is due and to fulfill the role of the opposition, which is to augment and improve legislation but at the same to acknowledge the value of legislation and how it's going to benefit communities.

I do rise to speak in support of this bill. You know, it's a piece of legislation that makes sense. I know that, again, with the movement of many Albertans from using land lines to now using mobile devices, there's been a significant reduction in the number of land lines. Many homes and families do not even have land lines anymore, and in order to provide the essential 911 services that many municipalities provide, they need the appropriate funding. This act will place a levy that will help them meet their needs.

As well, I just want to mention that the levies that will be garnered through this bill will be spent on essential financial support to local 911 call centres and used in part to enhance 911 call operator training but as well to allow the upgrade of equipment to meet the changing technological requirements, which I think is very important if we want to make sure that we're up to date and up to speed.

I think as well that this bill is valuable in that it establishes liability limitations for employees who work at the 911 call centres, so we're going to protect the folks that are doing their best to help connect people who are in need of this service with the appropriate services. It's also going to reduce the potential for damages if there are any allegations of breaches of the quality of services provided by 911 call centres. I think that is very important.

5:10

As well, this is an example of a piece of legislation where there have been some discussions and conversations with the two organizations, the AUMA and the AAMD and C. I think it's critical that these conversations take place and that the government gets feedback about proposed legislation and how that's going to impact those that are going to carry it out or those that are going to be affected by it. It gives me confidence to be able to speak in favour of this bill because the AUMA and the AAMD and C agree that this is something that's practical and that is needed to help offset the costs to operate these call centres.

A couple of questions need to be raised, though. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Centre raising the question of families with multiple cellphones. You know, does that mean that each of those phones or mobile devices will be charged the 44 cents? I can appreciate that maybe for most people it's a fairly nominal amount, but it's still an important question of clarification.

As well, something else that I raise an eyebrow over is that the government is going to decide how much the wireless providers can retain to cover administrative costs. It begs the question, Madam Speaker: why not lay that out in the bill itself? Why not make it very clear and up front to all members of this House exactly what the portion is that the wireless providers are going to keep for themselves?

I think this is going to have a significant impact on many people, so if this legislation passes through this House, does it mean that any person who doesn't pay their phone bill is guilty of an offence and liable to be fined up to \$1,000? I think it's, again, important that we have some clarification on this before we move this bill further along.

In general, Madam Speaker, I do support the tenets of this bill. For municipalities that have call centres, this bill will help them recover some of their costs and lighten the burden that many municipalities are faced with.

I will leave it there. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 15.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any takers?

Seeing none, we'll move to our next speaker, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and speak to Bill 15, the Emergency 911 Act. Among other provisions this bill will legalize a 44-cent-per-month charge to cellphone users for 911 services, the same amount that is paid by land-line users. The government is putting forward this bill to offset decreasing revenues as phone users move away from land-line telephones. I, like many others in the House, am one such person that actually does this, and I know none of our neighbours have land lines anymore. This already incorporates a government-imposed 44-cent surcharge towards mobile phones. The subsequent revenues the government would receive through Bill 15 would be used for improvements and upgrades to 911 dispatch centres across Alberta and to enable 911 responses through text message and GPS location. The prospect of these new innovations is exciting.

However, there are still many questions around Bill 15 that should be answered before this bill passes into law. It's hard to support this bill when the 44-cent surcharge is essentially acting as a tax on Albertans who own cellphones. Virgin Mobile has already publicly called the 44-cent provision a tax, and I think all members would agree that a 44-cent fee to pay for a core government service like 911 is a tough pill to swallow, especially since Albertans already pay some of the highest cellphone rates in Canada and in the world.

I am also curious how the minister came up with the 44-cent figure to begin with. It seems arbitrary. I'd like for the minister to put forward some rationale for how he arrived at this number, and if not, I'd ask how he knows this fee will generate enough revenue to pay for the equipment and upgrades it's meant for. What happens if it's not enough? Does the fee go up? What happens if it's too much? Will the fee go down? Not likely. Included in the 44-cent charge is a 7-cent administration fee that will be collected by mobile phone companies. This strikes me as slightly high

considering most telecommunication companies already charge a hefty administration fee to their clients.

Many cellphone users also pay a 911 fee in association with their monthly bill, that will exist independent of the 44-cent provision. I would ask on behalf of those Albertans already paying an additional fee for 911 services where their money is currently going. I know on my own bill I have the administration fee for 911 already there, and I have no idea how it's allocated. There's no accountability for what that fee goes to, and we're not even sure how much of it actually goes to the administration of 911 calls. We should be careful that we're getting a fair deal for Albertans before we rush a decision such as this.

There is also the issue with the funding allocation formula that is going to be used. What is it? We don't know, and there are a variety of possibilities that don't sit right with Albertans, like the base formula that was suggested in the 2008 report. Through this formula funding allocation would be based on population alone. Edmonton and Calgary would be poised to be the big winners while rural dispatch centres are stuck trying to meet a new generation of standards and practices with inadequate funds and resources to do it with. Rural centres do have an additional problem with cellphone coverage. Does that mean that the 911 centres in rural Alberta won't receive as much funding? If so, how are they going to equalize this? This could ultimately force our rural dispatches to amalgamate or shut down entirely. Essentially, Albertans living in rural areas could lose access to 911 services while at the same time paying for more.

In my own area we are kind of already seeing this. One of the things we see there is with EMS. We know already that some of our more rural locations cannot get access to EMS service because there is a problem with the GPS location. So I'm just clarifying for Albertans exactly what this would mean as well.

If we're going to ask Albertans to pay this money, we need to give them a fair formula for allocating the resources first. This government campaigned on transparency, and what we see time and time again is a concerted effort on their part to hide information. This is turning into another example of that. We need a funding formula that is open and honest.

We all own cellphones, and I'm sure we've all accidentally pocket dialed someone before. It's happened to everyone. The minister says that frivolous calls to 911 will carry with them a first-time punishment of \$5,000 but that pocket dials will be forgiven. I'd like to know how the minister plans to investigate frivolous calls and what evidence he would or wouldn't use to impose a penalty in association with that. I'd also like to go one step further. What will the minister do to those people who make the frivolous calls but have no assets, who have no income, or who may not be capable of understanding what a call to 911 truly is? I'd like to know what the parameters around that \$5,000 fine would be.

There are too many areas where I take issue with Bill 15 to support it wholly at this time: the 44-cent levy, the 7-cent administration charge, the lack of a clear funding formula, questions surrounding pocket-dial issues. These are all important questions buried deep in the regulation of Bill 15 that won't see the light of day until after this bill is passed into law and it will finally be opened to opposition scrutiny, not to mention market and Albertans' scrutiny.

There are some questions around the validity of Bill 15 as well. It's not uncommon anymore for every member of an ordinary-sized family to own a cellphone. It is also not uncommon for just one or two members of the family to own a cellphone, usually the parents, and then either lend it to their children or go on the family plan. I am not one such parent as my 11-year-old has been told she

can't have a cellphone until she's 18 and can pay for it herself. Bill 15 would ask one family to pay significantly more than the other in any given year. Bill 15 assumes, therefore, that one family is more likely to need emergency services than the other. Or is Bill 15 simply a tax on cellphone owners? Has the minister considered a reduced tax for those people who go onto the family plan or for those people who have multiple cellphones in their home but are sharing amongst multiple members of their family?

5:20

It's clear to me that while Bill 15 will usher in many good provisions like liability protection for the hard-working men and women involved with 911 dispatch and new provincial regulations for standards of service and equipment, there are still many issues that could potentially prevent Bill 15 from achieving its desired goal.

Once again we get back to the discussion of transparency. It seems interesting to me that this bill is being brought forward as a government bill, that clearly the government has set this as a priority, that clearly the government is telling Albertans that this money is needed, and that clearly the government has established that 911 centres in Alberta need additional funding. I'm not necessarily disagreeing with any part of that, but once again I wonder. I wonder how many members of the PC government currently in power went to the doors and actually knocked on the doors and said: if you elect me tomorrow, I'm going to put a levy on your cellphone of 44 cents, and this is exactly what it's going to be used for. Now, I understand that they may not have known that the levy was 44 cents at the time, but they certainly would have known that this was a priority. The report is from 2008, and they certainly could have used that.

Once again we're in a situation where members opposite did not go to the doors and tell taxpayers that they're going to raise taxes, much the same as we've seen with so many other things. It's not transparent, and it's not honest. Once again we're not seeing it here. There is no accountability for the 7 cents in administration. They're not saying exactly what that goes to. Exactly how much does it cost in administration? Surely, they've done studies on the other side that would say that administration of this levy would cost X number of dollars, which would justify the 7 cents, yet we see none of that coming forward in the proposal. It's easy to solve. If the government has it, provide it. If the government doesn't have it, then they should do a study on exactly what that 7-cent administration is likely to be and what it should be used for. If it truly is too much, then reduce it. If it's not too much, then justify it. That should be pretty easy to do, and that's open and transparent to all Albertans.

Given that we're playing with taxpayers' money, we need to be in every decision, first and foremost, open and transparent to taxpayers. The additional 37 cents that it says will be distributed to 911 centres: there's no plan for that. It doesn't tell us exactly how that distribution is going to play out, how it's going to go to rural or urban or if it is even going to be a split. Yes, the report says that it's by population. Once again, when you were knocking on the doors during the campaign, and you had a 2008 report – clearly, this is a priority for the government – were you telling them that this is where their 37 cents was going to go to? Were you even addressing that 911 call centres across this province were in trouble?

With respect to all of my aforementioned reservations I recommend the government take more time to study Bill 15 in its fullness and look for ways to improve it. I'm more than willing to work with them to find improvements and amendments to Bill 15 that would make all Albertans happy. I support Bill 15 with

reservation and recommend the government examine these outstanding issues before entering it into law.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm also rising in support of Bill 15. I've got a couple of questions here. The first question is on how we arrived at the levy of 44 cents per month. Is it to cover the shortfall we have right now in the 911 call centres? How much money will be paid to the telecommunications providers for administration costs and all of that? How long before the 44-cent levy goes up? Another year?

Another question is: what will happen if the telecommunications provider, you know, dissolves the company? What will happen to the money? How will the government recover that money from the call centres?

Another question is about families who have multiple cellphones. There are so many families out there like my family that have, I think, five or six of them. I don't mind paying 44 cents, but that's another question that comes to mind. This particular program at first blush looks beneficial to all Albertans, especially rural Albertans, but it also dumps the responsibility for the management of this onto a third party in municipal bodies. In the likely occurrence of a cellphone provider dissolving or disappearing, like I said before – no company will last forever – is the municipality still on the hook for those funds collected but not yet paid to the municipal government? If the provincial government is collecting those fees, what process do they have for the collection of the third-party debt?

Those are some of the questions that I have. I think we should be looking into that to make this fair for everybody. Those were my reasons for rising, but I still support Bill 15 because it's going to save lives, Madam Speaker. Anything is worth the cost to save a life.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I'm glad to hear that members opposite are supporting this bill. Let's talk a little bit about what this act is going to do for rural Alberta. As we do know, a number of years ago the government embarked on – in part it was the hon. Member for Airdrie, in the bill that he wrote – a transition of ambulance service into Alberta Health Services. When that happened, obviously there was the opportunity for ambulance services to be in or to be out. What we've seen from the very beginning is ambulances wanting Alberta Health Services, communities in fact wanting Alberta Health Services to provide direct delivery, to manage and operate and own the cost of it because they recognized the opportunities, I presume, to deliver more effective health care.

Inherently when we think about first responders and the 911 dispatch centres, they typically dispatch those front-line staff. From community to community we know that those 911 call centres vary, particularly around ambulance dispatch. When the municipalities owned it, they were responsible in part to provide the infrastructure, particularly when you talk about those land lines. That's what a lot of those ambulance services and dispatch services in the past were built on and grown on. But we've seen a change in Alberta. We've moved into the 21st century. People are using cellphones, and the technology has gotten better. In fact,

there's probably a greater conversation because of that technology and access to lots of information.

Madam Speaker, the big part of the additional cost for this is to provide for that infrastructure. If that infrastructure isn't there, well, it's just simply not there. What we see are calls dropped. What we see are lag times in getting those first responders, whether they be firefighters, police officers, or paramedics, into the field. A large part of that is to support the infrastructure from a cellular stance but also the hard line because we also know that not everybody in rural Alberta is going to own a cellphone, perhaps. It's just a part of doing business that I believe is going to help us provide emergency services to Albertans. Isn't that what we should be doing instead of creating innuendo and campaigning and talking about campaigning and what we did at the doors?

Madam Speaker, I can tell you as an advanced care paramedic what I said to people when I took that oath. Certainly, when I took the oath here in this House, when people put their trust in me, I said that I would do what was right, that I would protect them. It wasn't about my campaign promises about taxes. I told them I'd drive the car for them, and I'd drive it as straight as possible. But what I won't do is that just because I said I'd drive the car straight, when I see a cliff coming, I'm not going to continue straight off that cliff. I'm going to turn. I'm going to make an adjustment for the time that we have here and now to build up Alberta, to do the right thing, not what's political or political rhetoric.

That pertains again back to the infrastructure that we need. That's what this act is going to do. It's going to start allowing us to provide for the technology for the information systems to make sure that calls aren't dropped, that calls aren't missed, to put computer-aided dispatch computers in ambulances so that we can see where they are in real time. Madam Speaker, that doesn't just pertain to the safety of the people that are actually calling for the service; it's actually for the paramedics and the police officers and the firefighters, so that we know where they are.

5:30

You know, being part of that dispatch system and having been dispatched, I can tell you that when they see the car parked and they see it stopped, it gives them the ability to know if that crew is in trouble or in danger. The cellphones that we have: there are a multitude of them now in rural Alberta. That's good to see. Again, it's to provide the infrastructure for the farmer who falls off the tractor and is now hurt with a broken leg. I can tell you that when I worked in the rural ambulance service in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, that happened a lot. In fact, I can tell you that my aunt tells my uncle all the time, who's farming, and her son and their family and their loved ones to wear a cellphone when they're out rounding up the cows, when they're out on the combine in case there's a problem so that they can call 911.

Again, that is a positive thing for Alberta. The costs associated with this: obviously, we know there are administration costs to that. You know, there's nothing nefarious here. This is about protecting Albertans. This is about doing the right thing. This isn't a political decision. This is about building infrastructure that's going to protect the front-line staff so that they can get to the people who need them the most.

Madam Speaker, I'm in support of this bill. I'm glad my colleague is in support of this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members who would like to speak under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: I just wanted to make a comment and maybe have you elaborate a little bit more. You made it sound like these farmers are always in a wreck, you know, falling off their horses and falling off their tractors. I've got many friends and family members who are ranchers and farmers, and we use horses and tractors every day. I can't remember the last time we, the people I know, had to call 911. Maybe you'd like to just elaborate on that a little bit and clarify that we're not all in a wreck all the time.

Mr. Fraser: Madam Speaker, let me clarify, I guess, from my own personal experience. My dad is somebody whom I love dearly, a man that probably has come too close to the edge of being in serious trouble due to his activities on a horse with his brother out on the farm. The time that I got the call from the hospital in Drumheller, you know, that he may have an internal bleed because he broke his pelvis on a horse that reared up on him or the time that the horse bucked him off and broke his scapula: I guess there are some personal things there.

What I can tell you is this. Let me talk honestly. Many times as a child I spent my summers on the farm in my uncle's care, in my grandmother's care when my parents were going through a rough divorce. You know what? Those were probably some of the fondest memories I'll ever have of my childhood. Between my grandmother and the people out on the farm, I can't tell you what a connected group of people they are and how they care for one another and how they are safe. In fact, it's their common sense and their connection to their community which I believe contribute to that overall safety. I just mentioned it in terms of the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and her comments. Did we knock on the doors? Did we go out to the rural families?

Again, I'll make the comment that the world is ever-changing, and it's better for us to make a turn that protects Albertans rather than just go off the cliff. That's what we said that we would do. I just think, you know, we need to be nimble as a government, and we need to be effective. That's not always popular, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

We still have two and a half minutes under 29(2)(a). Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, are there any other members who would like to speak on Bill 15, the Emergency 911 Act?

Would an hon. member like to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 16

Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 16, the Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013.

The proposed changes in Bill 16 will amend both the Victims of Crime Act and the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. I appreciate that the latter can be a bit of a mouthful. The bill focuses on financial benefits of victims of crime and helps to ensure that the government responds to victims in an informed and timely manner. We will continue to put the rights of victims

first, ahead of offenders. Victims of serious crime resulting in injury are entitled to financial benefits. These benefits help victims cope and move on from the trauma that they have suffered.

I'm going to speak first about the proposed changes to the Victims of Crime Act. Madam Speaker, the last thing that this government wants to do is subject victims to time-consuming, long, and protracted or arduous processes and procedures with respect to receiving the financial benefits they qualify for. The victims of crime financial benefits program gives victims the options to have their case reviewed by the Criminal Injuries Review Board, otherwise referred to as the CIRB.

In order to streamline the current process, a fair number of amendments in Bill 16 deal with streamlining CIRB processes and reducing delays. The amendments would allow a member of the CIRB who has completed an initial evaluation in a case to also sit on the subsequent review panel. The amendments would also clarify that a case can be heard by only two CIRB panel members rather than a full component of three. These changes would add clarity to the legislation and, again, streamline the process. They will also make the decision process faster for victims, who will no longer have to wait for the full board to be available before their hearing can proceed.

The proposed amendments give CIRB the power of a commissioner for the purpose of conducting hearings. This would ensure the board has necessary authority to conduct hearings and obtain information needed to make decisions. Further, Madam Speaker, the amendments would allow the board to obtain expert advice from time to time and to request that a victim undergo a medical examination if necessary to determine the extent of their injury.

The amendments would also require the board to inform the victim of his or her right to choose an oral hearing or a written review. Many ask: why would this be an issue? Well, it's about fairness to victims and giving them more options. Victims who wish to discuss their experiences in person in a hearing would have the right to do so. Conversely, victims who do not wish to appear in person – for example, often but not limited to the case where the victim has suffered something very personal – could opt for a written review, in which they would not have to attend. Again, Madam Speaker, this is the sole choice of the victim. That's what this legislation would offer.

The next amendment would extend the time period in which a victim must report a crime to the police. Currently a victim can report the offence to police within a reasonable period of time after the incident took place. We would propose the change to a "reasonable period of time" after the applicant knew or ought to have known that the criminal offence occurred. Those people who are legally trained in this Chamber will know that this mirrors section 3's language in the Limitations Act. This would also make it easier for adult victims of childhood sex abuse to receive financial benefits. It also enshrines in legislation best practice for serving victims and recognizes the need for flexibility in these situations.

Madam Speaker, we also propose to streamline the review processes I have mentioned. Currently, when new information arises, the board must send the case back to the program director. Pursuant to the amendments, if it is decided that new information is not significant, the board may hear it as part of the review process. These amendments will of course increase the efficiency of the whole process. They will also ensure that we avoid any unnecessary delays that would have a negative impact on the victim.

Proposed amendments would also give CIRB authority to withhold confidential information, otherwise known as redacting, provided by third parties such as police and health services

records. This respects the independence of our law enforcement process as well as our investigative process. For example, the release of this information could compromise ongoing police investigations or reveal practices and tactics, matters which the police are entitled to keep private. These amendments would also help ensure that sensitive information is protected while speeding up the review process for victims.

The amendments would also ensure that the transition between the current and the proposed legislation is seamless. Madam Speaker, any applicant who requested a review after October 1, 2011, will be able to choose an oral or written review, as I had mentioned. Requests before that date will remain subject to the act in place at that time.

5:40

There are also a number of proposed housekeeping amendments meant to ensure consistent wording and correct cross-referencing in the Victims of Crime Act as well as including information about death benefits, which was an oversight when the act was last amended, in 2011.

Madam Speaker, I'll now focus on the proposed amendments under the second act, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This was an act, actually, passed originally by our current Minister of Human Services and later proclaimed in 2008 by the Premier when she sat in my chair as Justice minister. The particular act provides the tools necessary for Alberta's civil forfeiture office to seize the proceeds of crime through the courts. These processes have supported a number of programs and services, including without limitation those for victims of crime.

Madam Speaker, while the majority of those whose assets are seized do not contest the action, the government must go through the same court process regardless of whether the seizure of assets is contested or not. Bill 16 proposes a process whereby those who may have their assets confiscated have 30 days to respond to our forfeiture notification. If an objection is filed, then the forfeiture action proceeds to court. Interestingly enough, the current legislation under the *Rules of Court* allows for 15 days when a statement of claim is filed, so this gives twice that period of notification.

If an objection is not filed, the forfeiture proceeds through an administrative process and without court intervention. In the event that a person has not responded to the notification for a truly legitimate reason, that person can apply to the courts to have the forfeiture action reversed. If the application is successful, the objection is considered filed, and the forfeiture proceeds to court.

To be clear, real estate is not subject to the proposed amendments. This deals strictly with personal property and not with real property. Houses and other real estate will continue to be dealt with through the existing court process.

Additional amendments strive to end baseless legal delays by putting a reasonable time frame and limits on the number of adjournments in a case that can be made. This speaks, again, to moving away from what our ADM, Greg Lepp, had talked about as being a culture of delay. This moves away from that culture of delay. History shows that in at least 75 per cent of forfeiture cases mandatory paperwork is never filed by the defendant despite their continued requests for adjournments to do so. These unnecessary delays are a burden to an already busy justice system and delay the government in getting the criminal proceeds off the streets and the criminal proceeds into the hands of groups designed to deal with victims or, actually, to prevent crime.

The last amendment that I want to highlight deals with the assumed criminal proceeds uncovered during a police investigation. I stress again that this is during a police investigation. The amendment proposes that if the police find more than \$10,000 in

cash or assets that are easily converted into cash and there is no legitimate sign of business activity, it will automatically be presumed that this money is from the proceeds of crime. Of course, Madam Speaker, the owner of the cash can provide evidence to show that the cash is somehow not connected to the crime.

Madam Speaker, the Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, honours victims of crime and helps the government do right by them. The amendments will also give victims of crime more options, help protect confidential information, and make the review process more efficient. They will also ensure that people who bring baseless or frivolous or vexatious legal actions that delay the forfeiture process will be screened out earlier in the process. These amendments enhance the timeliness of forfeiture actions and bolster the police's ability to seize goods and money obtained illegally while still preserving due process.

Ultimately, this increases the money available for victims and crime prevention programs for all Albertans. Of course, this money does not go into the police's wallet. It does not go into the government's coffers. It is given, actually, to organizations that we've seen help victims or prevent crime. Over the last five years over \$25 million has actually gone through this process.

Bill 16 is key to ensuring that we continue to offer excellent services to victims of crime throughout Alberta. Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. I therefore propose that Bill 16, the Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013 be moved through second reading.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 16, the Victims Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, which amends two pieces of legislation, the Victims of Crime Act and the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. There are many changes throughout this bill, but I'll only highlight a few of them.

The amendments to the Victims of Crime Act allow for a simplified review process of decisions made by the director in charge of carrying out the duties of the act and also reduces some of the complexity that existed in the review process.

The amendments to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act essentially make it easier for the minister to confiscate property obtained by or used in illegal activities by creating an administrative process for such procedures.

One additional change is the limit to the number of extensions that an individual can be granted in preparation of a disposition hearing. The one thing that lawyers can certainly do – and their clients do it all the time – is to ask for extensions of time, stretching out the process. Of course, one would hope that every available avenue to reduce that type of undue delay is sought.

There are other minor changes that can be discussed in more detail in Committee of the Whole. One material change is that authorities are now being granted the power to confiscate cash or negotiable instruments, as that is defined in the act, if over \$10,000 of such funds can be associated to drug activity or are found in bulk amounts not associated with the regular course of business activities.

I was pleasantly surprised by some of the amendments put forward by the Justice minister. Since he's been given his position, he has pursued what I'd call a complete soft-on-crime agenda, his progressive justice policy agenda. He may have found his world view on justice policy back in 1995 when he was a Liberal staffer for the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, which was well into the Jean

Chrétien era. Maybe the minister is wanting to show that contrary to everything else he has done to date, he is actually not soft on crime. If that is his intention, I definitely support that, to actually come up with some policies that would reduce crime and also help the victims of crime.

We saw events in the past year where there's been the elimination of the electronic monitoring of criminals, the slash of the safer communities fund, the two free passes for individuals who commit crimes of theft or vandalism. We also saw delays in the court system. Where individuals who've been charged with sexual assault, where the police investigation warranted a charge and where the Crown prosecutor after an analysis of the evidence found that a charge was warranted, due to the delay in the justice system, the defence was actually able to get those cases thrown right out of court, and the victims in those cases certainly did not see justice. So it's good that the minister is maybe finally turning a leaf and taking some of our criticisms to heart.

What we really need is a comprehensive, real concerted tough-on-crime approach here in Alberta. We need to seriously pursue criminals and criminal activities and ensure that the crooks who break the law receive swift, certain, and severe penalties. Get your affairs in order and start taking care of the victims of crime in Alberta by making sure that the criminals actually get charged and go to jail. We've seen time and time again, which was actually outlined in the report by his ADM, where there was such a multitude of flaws in the current system that resulted in delay and resulted in the victims not having their day in court and their perpetrators not seeing the consequences of their actions.

We hope that, you know, although this act doesn't deal with that specifically, maybe this minister is turning a corner here and actually being tough on crime and actually supporting the victims of those crimes. If that's the case, of course, we would continue to support that movement away from a soft-on-crime liberal . . .

Ms Blakeman: Hey. Hey.

Mr. Saskiw: A progressive approach, not liberal.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

Mr. Saskiw: From a progressive approach to a more tough-on-crime conservative approach, that the Wildrose favours.

Madam Speaker, I believe that some of these amendments put forward in this bill will assist in halting organized crime. I look forward to debating the specific provisions of the act in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

5:50

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm struggling with this act. I haven't been able to quite work through it enough to be able to walk you through all the sections that I'm not happy about, so I'm paying attention to what others are saying about this, including the minister, of course.

I'll tell you where my cautions come in. I keep seeing this government – this is the second or third time, I guess, where we have moved from a court setting with all that that means, you know, the ability to call witnesses and cross-examine and all the stuff that flows from the Constitution, to an administrative setting where those things don't necessarily apply. Actually, a lot of them don't apply.

I'm just as concerned as everybody else about crime. I represent downtown Edmonton. Most of my constituents think that we have way more crime than we actually do, but it's very hard to convince them of that. I want people to feel safe. I want them to report crime and not cover it up because it's a friend or whatever. I want them to participate in that policing and justice, the courts and the Solicitor General, you know, incarceration sections. That's important for my people because a lot of them are living on the edge or over the edge in their relationship with those particular bodies.

But I always look at this and think: "Okay. What if it was me?" I would hope that it wasn't, but we've got to be honest with ourselves. We hope lots of things. We hope, you know, that none of us will ever be poor or homeless or sick or get beat up or get yelled at. There are all kinds of things we hope won't happen, and in fact sometimes they do, sometimes of your own stupid decisions and sometimes bad luck, being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

So when I look at this and I'm trying to work my way through the consequences, intended and otherwise, of what's being done in this act, I'm struggling because I think there's more here than meets the eye. There's the version that the minister puts out that this is about looking after victims – good; excellent – that it's about punishing bad guys. Okay. But part of what we've always done in our legal system in Canada is make darn sure that we punish the right bad guy and not the wrong person. Even trying to do that, I think, in a fairly stellar way in Canada, particularly compared to our neighbours to the south, we've still made some monumental mistakes.

I think we always have to be very cautious about where we give power or forfeit power around the law. You've got to be careful about this stuff because if you hand over your ability to be a free person to someone else and they make a decision that they're going to lock you up, you're kind of hooped. You agreed that they had the power to do that, and now they can do it to you. So is that really what you intended?

Let me back up a bit here. I remember once there was a debate on gun legislation here, and people kept getting up and saying, "Oh, you know, my kid was just doing this, and he got picked up and he got fined or charged with something," and I kept thinking: "Yeah, and they broke the law. So what is the problem?" But we need to be careful that we're not judge, jury, and jailer before the fact.

I often hear people in here make the same mistake, where they talk about people in the remand centre as being inmates or convicts or crooks or criminals in some way. In fact, that's wrong. People are in the remand centre usually because they don't have an address, so they don't get released on their own recognizance. They are kept there so that the courts know where to find them. Some of them are truly heinous people – they are gang members and murders and other people – but there is also a fair number of them that are mentally ill or homeless or very poor and don't have the resources. They don't have an address to give, and guess what happens? The rule is: give an address where they can find you or spend time in the remand centre.

I have constituents that end up in the remand centre, and they're not crooks, criminals, convicts, or bad guys, and they are certainly not inmates, which indicates that they have been charged and convicted of a crime. They haven't been. We have to be very cautious about casting people or even creating a situation where that can happen to people. I'm really looking for the double checks that need to be in place here.

As I said, this moving from a court-based system with all of the protections and double checks that are inherent in that system and moving to an administrative tribunal is a different thing. It just

caught my ear when I heard the minister say: well, to all of you with a legal background in this House, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I thought: hmm; we shouldn't need to have a legal background to understand what's going on.

Mr. Denis: I didn't say that. You misrepresented the truth.

Ms Blakeman: I put in the blah, blah, blah part, so that should cover it.

Mr. Denis: That's all I hear when you speak.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, Minister. Do you really have to descend to that level? Really, Minister?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair.

Ms Blakeman: I would love to go through the chair, but that's pretty disappointing behaviour from someone that's supposed to be a grown-up. Okay. [interjection] If the Minister of Justice really feels that he needs to get up and demean me, please take the opportunity to do that.

Mr. Denis: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
We have a point of order.

Point of Order Remarks off the Record

Mr. Denis: Standing orders 23(h), (i), and (j). At no time did I demean this member. I request that she withdraw those comments.

Ms Blakeman: No. I'm sorry. I have someone here that is deliberately making comments that I can hear. Yes, you're absolutely right, Madam Speaker. If we'd gone through you, that wouldn't have happened, but he intended me to hear demeaning comments, and I heard them. [interjection] Well, then we can postpone this, and the Speaker can find out what's in *Hansard* exactly because *Hansard* has got pretty good mikes. I bet you they picked up the comments, and we can all come back and look at this again.

I'm not going to withdraw those comments. If the minister feels that he needs to sit here and make comments about me while I'm speaking, then use the opportunity under 29(2)(a) to get up and put them on the record. All I'm trying to do is express an opinion and express on to my constituents what's going around a bill. He should be able to stand a little questioning around that.

So, no, I'm not going to withdraw my comments, Madam Speaker. No offence to you or to this Assembly, but I can't.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, I don't think there's a point of order here at all. We should just move on with business, I think. The Justice minister didn't even bother expanding upon the rationale for his point of order. It was like an eight-word point of order, almost nonsensical. We'd have to look at all the facts, but there's no point of order here.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, thank you for that.

It is now 6 o'clock. We will respond to the point of order when we return at 7:30 p.m. The Assembly stands adjourned.

Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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