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The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 53

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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Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
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Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (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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Eggen	McDonald
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Lemke	

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Bilous	Kubinec
Blakeman	Lemke
Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
Fenske	Webber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 6, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members and guests, let us pray. On this beautiful day let us be reminded of the freshness that comes with spring: the birth of new buds on trees, the sprouting of beautiful plants and foliage, and the reappearance of beautiful flowers that enhance our province from border to border to border to border. Let us also be reminded to take time to stop and smell those beautiful flowers. Amen.

Now, please remain standing as we listen carefully to one of Alberta's rising young stars, who is going to sing for us *O Canada*, our national anthem. Welcome Alexandra Brigley all the way from Coronation.

Miss Brigley:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Alexandra. [applause]
Thank you, members.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: School groups first, beginning with the Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some wonderful students from St. Vincent elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They are seated in the public gallery. I had the opportunity to visit their classroom, and their questions were absolutely excellent. They're visiting with their teacher, Lori Lundeen, and parent helpers Joan Hertz, Cathy Kreutz, and Joanne Slugoski. I would ask that they all rise now so that they can receive the warm welcome of the entire Assembly.

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

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise before you and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 25 of Clara Tyner elementary school's best and brightest grade 6 students along with teacher Sandi James and parent helpers Jackie Kanash, who knows my sister-in-law well; Carol Lamont; Lynda Lauman; Isabel MacBeth; Bryan Wigger; and Minerva De Tio, from my constituency, of course, Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm pleased that they are able to be here today. They're currently studying active citizenship in their social studies class. As part of that program they've also raised money for the Stollery children's hospital and made sandwiches at the Mustard Seed. I would ask that the students, parents, and teacher now rise and receive the warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, I have some friends here today. If they could please rise. Diane Llewelyn-Jones is from Taber, and she is writing a screenplay for a movie on the Famous Five. She is here along with three dear friends: Rob, Terra, and Michael Hodgins, who were with me almost every day from January 1 until April 23 last spring. Please receive the welcome of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Windsor Park school. They're here as part of the School at the Legislature program. Here today are 21 students; their teacher, Mr. Lucas McCaw; and one parent helper, Dr. Deepali Humar. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that my guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups?

Seeing none, let's proceed onward with guests. The Deputy Premier.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a particular honour today. Number one, I'm doing my introduction on behalf of our Minister of Municipal Affairs. Sitting in your gallery is a young lady whom we have just heard sing a rendition of *O Canada*. Alexandra Brigley is a grade 9 student at Coronation school and, as you know, is a very, very talented young lady. She began formal music lessons in piano and singing when she started school and looks forward to competing in local and provincial festivals each spring. Alexandra's long-term goals are to perform in live theatre and also to teach music. Isn't that wonderful? She is accompanied today by what I would imagine are very, very proud parents, Dale and Brenda Brigley; and also Nick and Joe, who are her siblings; and, finally, some other relatives: Brian Heidecker, who has been involved with the U of A for some 30 years, including serving on the university's board of governors and even serving as a board chair; Shelley Heidecker; and Donna Bagdan. I'd now ask all of them to rise and receive our welcome. Thank you for the singing.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on the first of two introductions I have today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly no stranger to us, Mr. Doug Brinson. He's accompanied today by his wife of 42 years, Sharon. Doug, in addition to being one of the nicest guys in the building, is retiring after more than 15 years spent keeping this House and us safe as a member of the legislative security staff and, of course, as a sheriff. Before joining us here, he was a 30-year veteran of the RCMP.

Doug, I particularly want to say thank you on behalf of the government for your service to us every day. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special constituents of mine who have travelled to Edmonton today to watch question period, my daughter Jodie and

my oldest granddaughter, Tory Johnson. They are seated in the members' gallery. My daughter has helped me very much over the last six or seven years along the way. She normally sits at home and watches QP on TV, so she was glad to be able to watch it here today. I would now ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine, Carl and Eileen Christensen. They are both former teachers and reside near the booming metropolis of St. Lina. They are proud home-schooling parents of four children and, at least from the reports I hear, are particularly proud of their youngest daughter. Carl is the Wildrose constituency association president for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I appreciate everything he does and his wife for allowing him to do it. I would ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you my son, Ethan Notley. Ethan has been to the Legislature before but never to watch question period in person. He has however watched fairly regularly on TV, and he has indicated that I can pass on a couple of his observations. While he is now and always will be a member of the NDP, he admits to having a bit of sympathy for certain members of the government front bench. In particular, he says that he's quite aware of what a pain it can be to be lectured by me and suggests that if any members of the front bench are feeling particularly hard done by, they should simply revel in the fact that at least for them, unlike him, it's not a daily experience. I would ask that Ethan stand and that all members of this Assembly join me in giving him our traditional warm welcome.

Now, the reason Ethan is here today is mostly to give support to his very good friend Erik Heise, the next person I'm pleased to introduce. Erik is in grade 8 and has been enrolled in the Edmonton public school board's music enrichment program since grade 5, learning to play the cello. When Erik heard the news that the 50-year-old program would be eliminated due to a lack of provincial funding, Erik's very precise comment was: this is my hockey team; why are they taking that away from me?

With Erik today is his mother, Kari Heise. Kari teaches music, and she also sings in the renowned Eucharistic choir. Kari is here in support of Erik and to reinforce the fact that music education does not just create musicians; it also supports and significantly improves the overall education and success of students who are beneficiaries of a music education. She is frustrated that a government which promised to build our K to 12 education is instead making cuts that are causing the demise of a 50-year-old music program serving over 600 children in Edmonton. I would now ask both Erik and Kari to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Heather Workman. Heather is concerned that victims of domestic violence experience further victimization owing to a lack of support systems, which, in turn, leads to long-term health, social, legal, and financial problems. She is here to advocate for discussions on how support systems for victims of domestic violence can be improved. I'll be tabling today on Heather's behalf an article on Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin's call for restructuring the family law system. I will also be tabling the Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters April 2013 report on the problems with family justice. I would ask Ms Workman to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly guests here in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Balwin Community League, which will be celebrated with the greater community on June 22, 2013, in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. These guests give selflessly and fully to their community league to ensure that their goals and programs make a lasting difference to all. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Mrs. Cynthia Lenders, president of Balwin Community League and avid volunteer to the league's board; Mr. Graham Harbak, past president and maintenance director; Mr. Rick Chaulk, past president, who served eight years; Ms Marianne Ethier, treasurer and past area council 2 representative; Mrs. Joyce Krachkowski, social director and past ladies auxiliary codirector. Ms Terra Harel couldn't be with us today, but she serves as the special events director.

Congratulations and heartfelt best wishes to these outstanding volunteers of Balwin Community League. I would now ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two ladies who are here today on behalf of the Alberta Caregivers Association: Ms Anna Mann, the executive director of the Alberta Caregivers Association, and Joan Bowes, who sits on the board of directors for the Alberta Caregivers Association. It's no secret that these individuals and their association have worked closely with me on the development of my compassionate care leave bill. I'm also pleased to recognize and raise awareness in the House that it's Family Caregiver Week in Alberta. There are 4 million to 5 million caregivers in Canada, with 170,000 of them living right here in Edmonton. I'd ask that my two guests, seated in the members' gallery today, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: You have a second introduction. Proceed.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two young gentlemen who sat down with many elected officials over the last week, including me. I have a fond spot in my heart for young, talented doctors, so when these two gentlemen introduced

themselves to me, I couldn't help but invite them to see us all in action. Dr. William Wei Han is a second-year family medicine resident from Edmonton, and Dr. Chris Fung is a third-year radiologist and nuclear science resident also from Edmonton. These two residents are also very strong advocates for caregivers in Alberta, know a lot more about medicine than I could even fathom, and it's an absolute pleasure to introduce them today. I'd ask that my two guests rise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, followed by the Minister of Education.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a second introduction. I wanted to also introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Doug's daughter Cindy McMullen and her son Britton McMullen. Britton is a source of pride and joy to the family, and like his grandfather, he's demonstrated that courage runs in his family as Britton has faced and fought a difficult battle with cancer. We pray that he enjoys a very long, happy, and healthy future. I'd ask both him and his mother to please rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of mine, Mr. Dan Dennis, and four visitors that he has with him here from Brazil. Dan is the youth exchange co-ordinator for the Rotary Club of Athabasca and has been hosting Rui Brasil Neto, a student from Brazil participating in the program. Rui arrived in Athabasca in August and has been attending high school at Edwin Parr, just down the street from my house. During his time in Canada he'll be staying with four different families, including Dan and including my constituency office manager, Dawn Minns. His family from Brazil is with him here this week; that is, his father, Rui Brasil Jr., a doctor in Brazil; his mother, Iza Brasil, who is an orthodontist; and his younger sister Bea. When he returns to Brazil, he plans to begin studies to become a doctor just like his father, and then he wants to return to Alberta, which we would welcome. It's a pleasure to have them here, and I'd ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you an outstanding citizen and a constituent of mine. Mr. Sukhdarshan Singh Pannu is a passionate volunteer. He volunteers his time as a dedicated, tireless coach for the Edmonton Eagles Field Hockey Club and has led his team to five silver medals as well as a gold medal in the league tournament. His efforts go beyond field hockey. He is a tireless activist working as a fundraiser for the Salvation Army, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Red Cross, the University Hospital Foundation, the Sikh Federation of Edmonton, and many others. He was the recipient last week of the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton award for sports and leisure. On top of all that, he volunteers on my PC association board. He's joined here today by his wife and his nephew Harpreet Singh Sandhu, the editor-in-chief of *Asian Times*, a community newspaper. At this time I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Speaker's Ruling Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go on with question period, could I ask you once again to please tighten up your introduction of guests. We just barely made it today, and we didn't have that many guests to introduce. There are some jurisdictions, as you may know, that only allow a total of five minutes – total – for guest intros to be done. So bear that in mind.

1:50 Oral Question Period

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

School Infrastructure Funding

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose 10-year debt-free capital plan calls for the building of a hundred schools and renovating 60 others. It would do so without saddling future generations with \$17 billion worth of debt, like the government will. I mention this because the Premier, when she made her school funding announcements in front of elementary school students, got it all wrong. But now that I've explained the Wildrose debt-free capital plan to her again, will she stop acting like Pinocchio and tell the kids the truth about it instead of the made up scary tales that she told them last week?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Opposition is prepared to provide some information to Albertans, but that's exactly the point of actually announcing real infrastructure plans such as we did last week. I recall two weeks ago – perhaps it was three weeks ago – when we were at my estimates, the Leader of the Opposition randomly threw out that the reason they would be able to build infrastructure is because they would, quote, reprioritize \$4 billion in spending this year. So it's easy to say that you can promise one thing on one hand and not promise something on the other. We have a plan to build schools, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We would start with the patronage and corporate welfare this government likes to hand out.

When the Premier, though, was scaring the kids with her bedtime stories last week about the Wildrose, she neglected to tell them about her back-in-debt budget and the \$17 billion worth of debt that she is borrowing on their behalf. Why didn't she tell the kids about that?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's a wonderful opportunity to review the fact that a year ago Albertans made a choice between looking to the future, investing in infrastructure, understanding that it's worth creating 18,000 new spaces for kids as opposed to the build-nothing approach that we see from the opposition. It's not what Albertans chose a year ago, and it's not what they want today.

Ms Smith: Well, I certainly don't remember the Premier campaigning on going into debt, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier also didn't mention the really scary part. When those school kids just start to get themselves established 20 years from now, the entire \$17 billion worth of principal amount is going to be due, but the government isn't planning to set aside anywhere near enough money to pay it back. Why didn't she tell the kids that they're going to be on the hook for all of it?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we see in this Legislature every day is the Leader of the Opposition who should be concerned about her nose growing.

It has been very clear that we have put in place a fiscal plan that ensures that we are dealing with infrastructure, going to capital markets that invest in the long term, and ensures that this province can continue to grow, and that's what we're committed to.

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

Ms Smith: Still didn't campaign on going into debt, Mr. Speaker.

Political Party Donations

Ms Smith: Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a big problem with Alberta's election financing laws. The Chief Electoral Officer verified that the PC Party was indeed given a single \$430,000 bank draft for a huge donation, but the electoral office said it was okay because of what appears to be a new category of political contributions available to large, powerful organizations. It's called a bulk donation. This ruling has opened the door for the kind of self-serving political action committees like they have in the U.S. Why does the Premier continue to support a law that has the potential for such abuse?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we said when the opposition raised this last year, the most important thing that we could do was get the facts on the table and get a decision from the Chief Electoral Officer. We have had that decision. It has clearly ensured that what has been put in place is entirely appropriate.

I might suggest from the other perspective that this party should be very careful about suggesting that anything like that isn't appropriate since we certainly know that they have participated in exactly the same form of fundraising, and we wouldn't accuse them of doing anything wrong either.

Ms Smith: I can assure this Assembly we have never received a single \$430,000 cheque.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to trust that the election process is clean, fair, and democratic, and they are right to be concerned about what is going to happen in the next election if a large corporation, a law firm, a union, or a special-interest group can gather money into a single bulk donation and try to influence the election. Now that the Premier has seen the public reaction to this distasteful practice, will she act now to change the law to prevent future abuse?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have a very clear set of rules that are in place that are transparent, that ensures that everyone understands who makes political contributions and how they're made. For any political party to stand in this House and deny that they have not actually taken the same approach to political fundraising is slightly hypocritical.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, what the Wildrose has done in this Assembly is propose an amendment to close the Katz loophole, but the government voted it down. Now, in light of the potential abuse that was unveiled following the Chief Electoral Officer's recent decision, if the Premier won't agree to close the loophole to stop future bulk donations, will she at least agree to ban union and corporate donations altogether?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, we have a set of rules with respect to election financing that are rules that people can have confidence

in. We also have an independent Chief Electoral Officer, who, despite what the opposition says, has not said that anything untoward happened and in fact vindicated the people that this party slandered last year. That's why we have independent offices. The report is clear. No rules were broken, and it's important for us to respect those rules, as we did.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the noise level is rising here. The heckling is starting up again. I'd like to ask you to show some respect for the people asking the questions and for those attempting to answer them.

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the PCs have done nothing wrong, maybe the Premier can explain why they had to pay \$25,000 in illegal donations back.

Funding for Dementia and Alzheimer's Patient Care

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, they're doing this again, trying to save money on the backs of the most vulnerable Albertans. This time it's Alzheimer's and dementia patients. The government claims that their new centralized outcomes-based funding approach is better for patients, but in practice it is taking front-line resources and staffing away from patients with dementia and Alzheimer's. When the CEO of the Bethany care centre, that operates a number of facilities across Alberta, calls it a perverse system, will the Premier acknowledge her government might have made a mistake?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the patient-based funding, what the member is talking about, assesses the patients with Alberta Health Services to make sure that the funding goes to the patient in the right space at the right time. There are many instances where we can show that there are reductions of funding, and there are many instances where we can show that there are increases in funding. The whole premise behind this policy is that those in need will get the services, and the funding will follow.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's not what's happening. Front-line worker positions are being cut in facilities with some very high-needs patients because the funding model is biased against patients with dementia and those who are in end-of-life care. In Cochrane, for example, where there was a huge protest this past weekend, 13 aides and LPNs have been laid off, and other staff have had their hours reduced. How does that make patient care outcomes better?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, like I said in the first set of answers, Alberta Health Services' intention is to make the process responsible and responsive to the needs of the patient. There are cases that will fall through the cracks, and Alberta Health Services will review those. I'll say that if any of those circumstances arise, I encourage the people to raise these issues with Alberta Health Services directly, right at the site.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, these are dementia and Alzheimer's patients, who can't speak up for themselves.

The outcome we should be demanding for these patients is compassion. If the minister won't give us the right answer, will the Premier agree to reassess the complex formula for funding and

make the necessary changes to ensure that all patients get the care that they need?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the reason that we now have the system in place is because we have reassessed the formula for funding. Patient-centred funding ensures that the supports are there for patients and their families. In some cases that means that in structures and in organizations, if you actually take a personal interest in advocating on behalf of patients and families, staffing structures will change. That may affect staff, but it doesn't affect patients.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order was noted at 1:57 p.m.

The Leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

2:00 Research Development and Commercialization

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this Conservative government made devastating cuts to postsecondary education, nobody could figure out why. It just doesn't make sense. Well, now we know why. The Conservative agenda is to turn postsecondary institutions into R and D facilities for their big corporate donors. To the Premier: why are you suggesting that the University of Alberta change its motto from whatsoever is true to whatsoever is profitable? Why, Premier?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we promised Albertans was that we were going to ensure that our universities and the taxpayer dollars that we invest in them are diversifying the economy. We see already tremendous partnerships between the private sector and universities that are doing very well to invest in research that will grow the economy. All that we are doing now is continuing to deliver on that model. We know that boards of governors and presidents of universities know that it's important to invest in diversifying the economy, in finding new opportunities for economic growth, and that's why we made the decisions we did.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, hogwash. What the Premier is proposing to do is to tear down a mansion and build a shack in its place.

In his State of the City Address Mayor Stephen Mandel said that the University of Alberta contributes 5 per cent of this province's GDP, more than \$12 billion. Alberta's postsecondary institutions already have strong working relationships with industry. Most importantly, they do not sacrifice academic independence and freedom, something that rightly concerns Alberta's professors, teachers, and students. To the Premier. Your approach will drive out top researchers and students. What makes you think that Soviet-style central planning is a way to direct postsecondary research?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how to answer to theatrics like this, but let me tell you this. We know that there is fabulous research going on in our academic institutions, and that includes universities, polytechnics, and colleges. We also know that our professors have the academic freedom to engage in any research that they see valuable. We also know that all that is paid for by Alberta taxpayers. If there is a possibility to solve real problems with real solutions, monetize it, and bring revenue back to universities and to Albertans, I don't see what's wrong with that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the only theatrical trapeze artist is the Deputy Premier here.

This government has completely lost its way when it comes to postsecondary education. The pursuit of truth and knowledge, while not always of commercial benefit, is valuable in and of itself. Furthermore, some research, which does eventually prove to be of commercial benefit, would not be approved if the only motive was profit. Albert Einstein would not get funded in your Alberta, Premier. To the Premier: do you really think Alberta students voted for this when you claimed to have walked in their shoes? Premier, I'm asking you.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadian professors are the most cited and quoted professors in the world in academic journals, but we also know that not only this provincial government but our federal government is looking at making sure that the research that already happens in our institutions brings benefit to all of Canada and, frankly, de facto to Alberta. So the fact is that since we're investing so much into our postsecondary institutions, it only stands to reason that we benefit from it not only financially but by actually bringing real solutions to real problems that the world is struggling with right now.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

New School Construction Announcements

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier was busy using school kids as a backdrop for her partisan attacks on the opposition. On the one hand, this Premier is breaking promises with cuts to programs, increasing class sizes, and imposing a reduced quality of education. On the other hand, she pulls kids out of class to serve as props for her partisan political attacks on the opposition. My question is to the Premier. Can you get any more cynical?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it was very exciting last week to be able to travel this province with our Minister of Education and our Minister of Infrastructure and keep a promise that we made during the election, which was to build 50 new schools. There is nothing wrong with ensuring that we remind people that last year they had a choice, and they chose to build schools, they chose to create 18,000 new spaces for children, and they chose to have high-quality education. That's a promise we kept.

Mr. Mason: In the last election the people had a choice between a lake of fire and a bunch of broken promises, Mr. Speaker.

When parents and teachers agreed to allow their kids to participate in the Premier's news conference, did they know that they were agreeing to their kids serving as a backdrop to a Tory campaign event complete with cheap attacks on other political parties?

Ms Redford: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the wonderful thing about some of the work that we were able to do last week in announcing those schools was that there were lots of parents and community leaders there. What they knew was that they were coming to announcements to build new schools, to modernize schools, to create new spaces to make sure that our kids could excel to the best of their ability. There is no doubt that Albertans and parents understand that we made a commitment to Albertans, and we're going to keep it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the government has borrowed a whole bunch of money to build a whole bunch of schools, many of which should have been built 10 years ago. It's no great accomplishment. Only this Premier could manage to get bad press when announcing new schools, but it's no surprise given the slew of broken promises that follow this Premier around. My question is to the Premier. Will she apologize to Albertans for misusing their resources for partisan purposes and for using their kids as her props?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, we all get to work on behalf of the people of Alberta. We all get to make promises, and some of us, fortunately, get elected to actually deliver on our promises. When I look at what we do as MLAs and leaders of opposition parties and everything that we do to encourage public debate, that's part of what a democracy is. The last time I checked, the leader of that party was paid by taxpayers, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Research Development and Commercialization (continued)

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is another day and another example of this advanced education minister's failed government-knows-best approach. [interjections] Dr. Bob Church, who is a member of the Order of Canada . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Please, leader of the ND and whoever you're conversing with on the front bench, be it the Deputy Premier or whoever, let's stop that across-the-bow stuff. The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has the floor. He was interrupted, and I'm going to ask him to start over if he wishes or to pick up where he left off. It's your choice.

Mr. McAllister: I'm familiar with this, Mr. Speaker. It's take 2. Thank you.

Research Development and Commercialization (continued)

Mr. McAllister: It is another day and another example of this advanced education minister's failed government-knows-best approach. Dr. Bob Church, who is a member of the Order of Canada and a founding chair of the Alberta Science and Research Authority, is saying that the research plan under Campus Alberta and the government's latest announcement will be a complete disaster. He's warning that the centralized R and D superboard will result in the continued exit of top scientists, clinicians, and engineers from this province. To the minister: how does creating a brain drain out of Alberta do anything except take a hammer to whatever is left of the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, never mind take 2. This show will stay in a can because it has no resemblance to reality whatsoever.

If this Official Opposition critic for this ministry would actually take five minutes and choose to meet with me, send me a memo or a letter or ask a question, I would be able to perhaps illuminate him on the subject. The fact of the matter is that there will be no brain drain. The fact is that we will be giving our academia more options to engage in collaborative research if they choose to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I did try to meet with the minister when the budget was released and this was affecting postsecondaries, but he was busy tweeting from a beach across the world.

Given that Dr. Church is saying that this type of top-down, government-driven research hasn't worked anywhere in the world and given that he says the last time he saw this model in action was when he was a visiting scientist in the Soviet Union in 1972, will the minister admit that his plan to have bureaucrats staring over the shoulder of researchers is nothing short of a disaster?

2:10

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I will not be debating through this member on what Dr. Church may or may not have said. I'd gladly meet with him and discuss that myself.

It may have happened somewhere in 1972, but I can tell you right now that in Boston at MIT, in Tel Aviv, Silicon Valley, and Stanford all of that is happening, as a matter of fact, and I don't see a brain drain over there. Everybody is vying to work out of those institutions. We can be just as great if we give our academia that opportunity.

Mr. McAllister: Well, perhaps we'll try it like this. Minister, who do you think Albertans will find more credible on the issue of how to create innovation in our economy? A man who has been in the field for 35 years, is a founding member of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and is a former member of the Medical Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Research Council or a minister who has only been on the job for all of a whopping three months?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's really refreshing that they actually believe in science. Maybe global warming will be something that they will believe in soon.

I will tell you whom I will believe. I will believe our professors at the universities. I will believe the individuals I met with in Lake Louise over the weekend, who are the top researchers in Canada and Alberta who are looking at collaborative research not only with the private sector but with other institutes throughout the world, who are looking at solving real problems like global warming, believe it or not, with real solutions that are already taking place in our universities but could be delivered to market, could be commercialized and enrich our province and our research.

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

New School Construction

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Education Week in Alberta, when we honour the best of our educators and the best in education. I can tell you that for municipalities in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake as well as many others across this great province having a school means spaces to learn and opportunities for our children to grow. Unlike some other parties,

our Premier and our government prioritized education and are putting our commitments into bricks and mortar. My questions are to the Premier. Over the constituency week you announced a number of new schools. Can you tell me why our government is building schools while the Official Opposition says we should cut spending and delay?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've already talked about, this is a government and a party that's building Alberta, and we're proud of that. We have made that commitment to Albertans over time, and we made that commitment a year ago. We made a promise to keep investing in infrastructure – schools, roads, and hospitals – so that we can continue to succeed as we have in the past 40 years under a Progressive Conservative government. Eighteen thousand new spaces right across this province, that are going to allow children to excel, was a commitment we were proud to make last week.

Mrs. Leskiw: Again to the Premier. Many Alberta communities like Bonnyville and Cold Lake in my constituency are facing the pressures of a growing population. As a government we have committed to many more schools. In communities like Cold Lake when can we look forward to more school projects being announced like the ones announced in the 19 communities?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I don't know if that was a question or just a lot of preamble, but if somebody wants to address it from the government side, please do so.

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. One of the things that was really important last week is that we made sure that Albertans understood that while there were many announcements made, 30 new schools, there are more to come. We certainly dealt with the immediate growth pressures but worked very closely in partnership with school boards right across this province to make sure that we keep that commitment to build 50 new schools and modernize 70 because that's how Alberta students will be able to learn to the best of their ability.

Mrs. Leskiw: Again to the Premier. Given that this morning you announced \$11 million to support dual credit programming to encourage students to earn high school and postsecondary credits at the same time, how is our government helping to ensure that our kids will find rewarding careers? [interjections]

Ms Redford: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I hope the opposition will listen to this because it's actually about helping kids improve. We had the opportunity today to announce the dual credit system, which will be available to school boards right across this province, \$11 million over the next three years, so that students who are in high school and may choose to not take a purely academic track are going to be able to be given information and options and actually get credits ahead of time. That's what allows Alberta's kids to succeed.

Funding for Dementia and Alzheimer's Patient Care

(continued)

Mrs. Towle: Mary is 85 years old. She has dementia. She needs help with eating and going to the bathroom, she needs nine medications a day, she's frail, and she's in a wheelchair. She lives in continuing care. Now, because of the government's new funding model for seniors' care, Mary is going to suffer. AHS has

determined that patients like Mary can't meet the so-called outcomes and are therefore not entitled to the same level of care they used to have. Facilities that care for Mary are already laying off staff. To the Associate Minister of Seniors. It appears that this new funding model is leaving vulnerable Alzheimer's and dementia patients behind. Why?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to know and have confidence in their publicly funded health care system, that it's there and it's going to be there to respond to the needs of Mary, your constituent that you raised. Listen. At any time the province takes care of vulnerable people. We know that there are people like Mary around. We have caring, loving, dedicated staff that make sure that she doesn't fall through the cracks. [interjection] Sir, this lady will be taken care of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new AHS funding model is supposed to provide greater levels of care for patients with high needs, can you please explain how patients like Mary, who have dementia and need help getting dressed, washing up, and using the bathroom, are having their care hours decreased?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we talked about this a bit earlier. The patient funding model will respond to the needs. As the needs change, the responses will change. You can be assured that there will be patients that have fewer hours of service, and there will be patients that will have more hours of service. It will depend on the care plan, and it'll depend on the assessment given by the caregivers at each individual site.

Mrs. Towle: Unfortunately, those caregivers won't be there at each individual site.

Given that Alzheimer's and dementia patients have apparently been left behind by this Alberta Health Services funding model, will the Associate Minister of Seniors please commit to reviewing the model so that the very unique and very intensive needs of these patients and their families are addressed and not ignored?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, as we age and as the demographics change in this province, we're going to have an increase in higher levels of care throughout the province. This is part of the reason why the Premier and our government have committed to building more spaces across this province. Every one of the new spaces that we're talking about announcing in June or July will have care for dementia patients. Every one of those places will have opportunities for couples to age in place. Is it enough? Is it fast enough? No, it's not. We're getting there.

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

PDD Community Access Funding

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week during the constituency break I had the opportunity to speak with several of my constituents regarding PDD funding. Many are worried that these cuts may have serious, real-world impacts on them, their family members, their lives, and their quality of life. All of my questions are to the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities. How will the \$39 million cut to community access affect my constituents who are concerned that this cut will deny them the basic opportunity to participate and be a member of their community?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to that. We discussed that we're going to reduce community access funding in favour of services that provide more inclusive, more engaging opportunities in the community, like employment. I can tell you right now that while that transition is in place and assessments are ongoing, nobody, but nobody, who needs services will be denied services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that cuts have been made to postsecondary training institutions like Mount Royal University for their social work program for disabilities, how is the minister going to ensure that the difficulties that organizations are already having regarding staffing are not multiplied, compounded?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, we do have a strategic plan in place to deal with workforce issues and disability service workers, and a big part of that was the 10 per cent wage offer that was made this year. We do have a strategic plan going forward, developed in concert with service providers and postsecondary institutions. It's posted on our website for comment right now.

I am actually deeply concerned about the cuts in postsecondary institutions. We had a sign language interpreter program at Lakeland and a disability service worker program at Mount Royal. I'm concerned, and I will take that up with the minister of advanced education, Mr. Speaker.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many organizations are concerned with the July 1 deadline to submit revised budgets and that this is a very aggressive timeline to initiate change in caring for the vulnerable Albertans that we have here, will the minister consider extending this deadline?

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, at the moment we are working towards that very deadline. We are working collaboratively with service providers, PDD agencies, caregivers, guardians. I recognize completely that there is a concern out there about the pace of implementation. I also recognize I'm not going to have success unless I work with people. We'll see how the transition goes, but I am absolutely prepared to be flexible if I have to be.

New School Construction

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: During the election the Premier promised to build 50 schools and renovate 70 in four years. Last month in estimates the Minister of Education admitted that this promise will not be fulfilled. With 40,000 more students expected by 2016, even with the 50/70 plan this will leave 17,000 students without a classroom or a desk to sit in. Our classrooms are bursting at the seams, and the building of new schools is not being given a high enough priority. To the Premier: can you explain to me how we will educate these additional 17,000 students?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that this member of this opposition party agrees that there is a

need now to build schools for kids today and not 30 years from now. I would have to remind this member that we are only in year 1 of a four-year term, and we will do our utmost to make sure that our kids have the classrooms and the schools they need today and not 30 years from now.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that a school can be built in 18 months if the government scraps their addiction to P3s, which can take up to five years to build, why does this government simply not roll up their sleeves and start construction tomorrow on these 28 schools instead of forcing children and communities to wait until 2016?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we will be using funding models that make sense, and the funding models will be different in different communities. At the end of the day we made a very clear commitment to invest in infrastructure and to invest in building Alberta. That not only means schools, but it means seniors' facilities, it means hospitals, and it means clinics and many other pieces of infrastructure. But the fact is that, as everybody knows, very few people out there have enough cash up front to build everything with cash up front, so we will be looking at innovative solutions to bring the schools to kids today and not 30 years from now, like opposition would have it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that in 1993 the provincial government took away the local school boards' ability to tax citizens for schools and by extension the province would be responsible for building these new schools, when will this government either provide the necessary funds to school boards or, if they're too gutless to raise revenue, return the taxation powers to the local authorities?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government made a commitment to Albertans that we were not going to raise taxes, that we were not going to dig into their pockets until we did an entire review of what we were doing in our government. I would also say that the list of projects that was recently released was the first tranche of a number to come. We understood that there were pressures in certain areas of the province. We dealt with that as promised. Another promise made, another promise kept.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. In the last election this PC government ran on the promise of adequate funding for education. Mr. Speaker, this has turned out to be a particularly nasty, hurtful broken promise. For example, in Edmonton public schools the latest cuts include 44 education specialists from math to science, English to phys ed. Junior high sports programs are likely to be cut significantly as a result. How can this government rip \$19 million out of Edmonton public schools and a similar amount from boards across Alberta without knowing full well that these sorts of cuts would end up taking place?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member has read the 2013-14 budget, he would have seen that there wasn't a cut to K to 12 education, but there was an increase. Even though a minimal increase, there was an increase in the budget. Our Minister of Education is working collaboratively with all 62 school boards, making sure that every single dollar as much as possible ends up

in the classroom, benefiting students. That is why kudos go to our teachers and the ATA and our minister in achieving a long-term labour agreement that will allow us to better budget into the future and make sure that dollars get into the classrooms.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this government extracted \$19 million from Edmonton public for the next school year, resulting as well in the elimination of the music enrichment program, which for more than 50 years has provided affordable music instruction to students in Edmonton, how can this government stand by and claim their innocence while these cuts unfold? Music programs burn across Alberta while this government fiddles.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, grants for inclusion and small classroom size have actually gone up. What this member is referring to – and he should know well because he’s a teacher as well – is a music program that has been apparently eliminated that was an extracurricular activity, an after school program, thankfully delivered by teachers. Again, our teachers need to be thanked for the work that they do outside of classroom delivering extracurricular activities, but if he has an issue with those, he should be speaking with the school board, with the locally elected trustees who manage each school board’s budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that on one hand this Premier, this government uses education and young children in particular as campaign props while on the other hand they’re busy cutting school funding – and let it be known that that school funding cut to enrichment is a direct result of the budget cuts that came from this Chamber – why won’t this government clean up their act and give back the money they took away from education so that we can get on with the important business of looking after our children and the schools in which they learn?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, fancy, inflammatory language but very little truth. As I said earlier, the budget did not go down, but it has gone up even though a little. This member needs to be reminded that our school boards now will have to make some very difficult decisions. I know some school boards will have to be dealing with school infrastructure and others, but at the end of the day this Premier has made a commitment, this government has made a commitment not to balance the budget on the backs of kids, and we haven’t. We haven’t diminished school boards’ budgets, but they will have to make some difficult decisions on the infrastructure side perhaps, and I encourage them to look at that.

Electricity Pricing

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, over the last seven to 10 days the price of wholesale electricity in the province of Alberta has averaged more than \$400 a megawatt, and on more than one occasion the price has approached a thousand dollars a megawatt. Given that there are no reported problems, no increases in demand, and given that the average wholesale price of electricity across North America was less than \$40 a megawatt for the same time period, how can this government honestly say that Albertans have a very good, working electricity system?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, the electricity system delivered by the private sector and by the oversight regulators delivers to Albertans fair electricity at a fair price over a consistent, long period of time. In fact, I noticed that the hon. member wasn’t complaining about the fact that the price of electricity, the average pool price, was, like, \$28 in the month of February. Remarkably, when it’s really, really low, we don’t hear anything.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you. That’s because they’re not listening, Mr. Speaker. The ancillary costs doubled.

Given that TransCanada’s internal study found that Albertans are paying more than double what it costs to build a transmission line in seven western states and two other western Canadian provinces, to the minister: why are Albertans paying more than double the going rate?

Mr. Hughes: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is exceedingly skilled at comparing apples and oranges. I would say that if you look at his press release recently, he’s pointing out and suggesting that the costs are quite different when, really, in one case it’s trying to build a line in Alberta; in the other case 400 kilometres of it is underwater. If the hon. member would like to find us 400 kilometres in a straight line in Alberta that goes underwater where we could put a line, by golly, we’d be there right with him.

Mr. Anglin: You got it.

Given that Albertans are paying \$10 million per kilometre to build an above ground heartland transmission line, which goes past the schools and homes of Sherwood Park, and given that it only costs \$4.1 million per kilometre, half the price, to build the same size transmission line underwater, underground, which is supposed to be more expensive, how can this minister say that Albertans are not getting ripped off?

2:30

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are exceedingly well served by the electricity system they have in this province. They’ve had consistent, reliable costs that are right in the middle of the average supply of electricity right across this country. Albertans are well served. I would add that we’ve given additional teeth to the Alberta Utilities Commission to ensure that costs are kept under scrutiny through the build of these transmission lines.

Transition of Michener Centre Residents

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there are many concerns across this province for the residents of Michener Centre in Red Deer-North, who will be transferred to new homes in the community. Some parents of the 125 residents are pleased that their loved ones will be repatriated back to their home communities for care, but other parents and guardians have serious concerns about moving their loved ones. I’ve been assured that each resident will have an individual plan developed for them with the assistance of their family and caregivers. I understand that a resident will only be moved once their parents or guardians agree to the plans. I also understand that every effort will be made to move residents with their friends whenever possible. To the associate minister for persons with disabilities. Residents and staff have been told that it’s been mandated . . .

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I caught the tail end of that. I was trying to watch the member there. It relates to whether or not there's a mandate for residents that are cared for by the public guardian to be moved first. That is absolutely not the case. The public guardian represents a number of residents there, some with lesser needs and some with more profound needs. Every patient in there will be moved in accordance with an individual plan, agreed upon and developed with, in fact, the staff, our department, and their guardian.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: will parents, guardians, residents, and caregivers be able to participate in developing the plan for their loved one, and what will you do if a parent does not agree to the plan that is being developed?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I spent a good part of last week actually meeting with families from the Michener Centre. You know, we have some difficult but productive discussions going forward, and I'll continue to do that. Every individual in that place will have a plan developed for their particular needs and an appropriate destination identified as a result of that. From there, parents or guardians will have choices about what the best pathway for their loved one will be, and I will guarantee that we're going to work with every individual before they're moved. No one moves until there's a place for them.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: given that Michener staff are very concerned about the residents first but, secondly, more than 400 staff are concerned about losing their jobs, what kinds of supports will be available for the staff, some of whom are near retirement?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, you know, I have to say that the staff have been absolutely exceptional in very difficult circumstances, more difficult because of the planning at the individual level that needs to be done. We can't identify what some of the staff impacts will be right now, so it's a difficult time for staff. Despite that, they have pledged to be involved in the care plans for individuals, which is absolutely exceptional and speaks volumes for the great people that are there. Once those care plans, appropriate destinations are identified, we'll be able to work with staff. We can absorb some in AHS, in our own program. At all times we'll be working within the collective agreement, and people will be dealt with with dignity and respect and gratitude.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

PDD Front-line Staff Contract

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The associate minister of PDD is having a tough time selling his plan to cut \$42 million in program spending for the most vulnerable citizens. Front-line workers are worried about how they'll deliver quality care, and our clients are worried about how the cuts will affect their standard of life. Now we hear about a new gag order which is being imposed on all PDD front-line workers and service providers that threatens them against speaking out without prior consent from your government. The culture of fear and intimidation is being used to muzzle front-line staff like it did in AHS. Why is the associate minister adopting it to silence the people caring for people with developmental disabilities?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member's assertions were true, I'd probably be equally concerned about them, but in fact they're not. We've got a draft contract out there that nobody has signed yet, that's available for open comment. In fact, we're having a forum with service providers next week for everybody to comment. We're trying to standardize a contract on our side that deals with children's services and our needs. That clause came from children's services. It's out there for open comment. If anybody has a problem with it, I'm pretty sure they'll identify it in an open forum that we have next week. We're trying to work collaboratively.

Mrs. Forsyth: So, Minister, will you guarantee this House that there'll be no muzzling of front-line staff?

Mr. Oberle: I think I've been through that, Mr. Speaker. Overall, we have a budget increase. We've moved some money out of community access supports. We want to move more toward employment supports. We gave a boost of 10 per cent directly to front-line staff.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask that question one more time. Minister, will you guarantee that there'll be no muzzling of front-line staff or service providers?

Mr. Oberle: I apologize to the hon. member. I misunderstood the question. There was something probably on our side, not theirs. Mr. Speaker, I will guarantee, first of all, that people that need services will get them and, second of all, that those contracts will be fashioned so they meet the needs of front-line providers and the government. I don't know right now where that clause is going to wind up. But if there's a clause in there, it's for good reason, to protect people's health information or whatever else. There will be no muzzling of front-line staff to talk about issues in care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Aboriginal Youth Participation in Sports Programs

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People who participate in sports have the opportunity to develop many skills, some emotional and some physical. It allows us all to learn about teamwork, trust, self-discipline, respect for officials, and how to be good winners and losers. For some Albertans, though, there are barriers which do not allow them to play. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: what exactly is your ministry doing to increase activity in sport participation in underrepresented groups in Alberta such as in my communities?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member correctly points out, anyone who has participated in any capacity of sport, whether as an athlete, a coach, an official, or in any other capacity, knows that there are tremendous benefits for both the participant and the greater community. Sport can do more than that. Sport can be a tremendous agent for positive social change as well. I was very proud two weeks ago along with my counterpart at the federal level, the Hon. Bal Gosal, to sign a three-year funding agreement between the federal and provincial governments that will provide for programming focused on the very groups that my hon. friend is referring to.

Ms Calahasen: Given that my constituency has many underrepresented groups such as aboriginal youth looking to get more involved in sport, what is specifically being done to increase their

sport participation, especially if you have this agreement with the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is a very good question with regard to targeted programming. I'd like to acknowledge, first of all, that my hon. friend has been a long-time and tireless advocate on behalf of aboriginal youth throughout her long and distinguished career here in the House. One of the key areas that we're going to be working with through this program is that we're working co-operatively with the Red Cross to provide special training in both water safety and swimming skills. It may alarm you to learn that the drowning rate in our First Nations, Métis, and aboriginal communities is some 10 times what it is in the greater population. That is a shocking statistic and one that this program intends to address.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that we have money coming from the federal government and that we have organizations that have been involved for a long time with sports, especially dealing with aboriginal youth, what is the minister doing to be able to make sure that we are getting the results that we should be getting, especially when we're dealing with the North American Indigenous Games Council?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the programs that we have that I'm very proud of is Alberta's participation, the only province that participates, in the Arctic Winter Games. Those are coming up once again, and it provides for participation by northern Albertans in these traditional sports. But, beyond that, the programming and the funding that I just mentioned a moment ago will allow for the funding of a number of different programs. For example, one that has been ongoing involves some 42 aboriginal communities and some 8,400 program participants in order to provide them with the skills and the training necessary to allow them full participation in sporting events at various levels within . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

2:40 Infrastructure Planning and Maintenance

Mr. Barnes: This government is once again playing politics with infrastructure in Alberta. Some of our hospitals' basic safety requirements are being ignored in favour of friendly government projects. AHS has outlined for government an immediate need to upgrade the kitchen facility at the Calgary Foothills hospital, which hasn't received any kitchen upgrades since the 1960s. The Foothills kitchen has received several public health citations and is dealing with failing, obsolete equipment and mould issues. AHS has requested immediate funding to repair this issue. To the government: can you explain why this important issue has not been addressed?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this is really rich coming from a party that ran their last campaign on and continues to be committed to building less, yet every project in their constituency should be this government's number one priority. This government has committed to building Alberta, to building infrastructure, building it now, building it in a manner that is well thought out, and addressing as many of these infrastructure issues as we possibly can, not politically like they would have us do. We

will not diminish our infrastructure budget, which they would have us do, but we'll continue to invest in a methodical, rational, needs-based manner.

Mr. Barnes: A major safety concern not at all on the priority list.

Given that your government has ignored similar requests and deficiencies from facilities in Wainwright, Daysland, Fort McMurray, and Bonnyville and given that it's likely this request to upgrade the Foothills medical centre kitchen is going to suffer a similar fate, can you please explain how your government decides which projects are approved and which projects are not approved?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before in this House, our list of all the projects that we're doing is on our website, including the 30 that we announced last week. They're already up and on the website, so our three-year plan is there for all to see. You know, one day the opposition wants us to spend more money; another day they want us to spend less. We're building the right infrastructure in the right places at the right time.

Mr. Barnes: Given that Alberta Health Services has submitted this repair as an immediate concern and given that your government has ignored this health concern while at the same time funding projects that aren't even on the list of AHS capital requests, it's clear the government continues to play politics with taxpayers' money. When will this government release a prioritized project list for all Albertans to see?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I have to say it. It's on the website. I work with my colleagues in Education and in Health. They have budgets for maintenance and ongoing infrastructure challenges, and they build in priority, that the highest needs are built, and they have the money to do that in their budgets.

The Speaker: Airdrie, your point of order at 2:44 has been noted.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Just before we continue on, I want to make four quick comments. Number one, some of the preambles that some members are using are really getting carried away. There's not supposed to be any preamble, but some of you are particularly skilful at using given that and given that and given that, and you're making it into a 35-second speech with the given thats. Well, I can tolerate a little bit of it, but can't we tighten that up? We've left about five or six members who had questions on the list. They weren't able to get up because we're taking a little too long on that front.

Secondly, there are a lot of these toss-ins that some of you give right before you ask your second question or right before you give your second answer in the case of government, and those toss-ins take time. They don't maybe look like they do, but it means that you're going over the 35-second limit. Today we had about 10 or 12 people who violated the . . . [interjections]

That would be my third point, and that is all the side conversations. I know you've missed each other for a week and there's great love in the room – I understand that – but the side conversations today were well and beyond what is normally the case.

Next point. Some of you are becoming a little bit tricky with your heckling. You tend to hide behind someone else and then heckle away as if I can't hear you. Well, I can hear you, and I can pretty much recognize who you are, so let's not play those games with each other, okay? If you've got a heckle you want to throw in there and you have the guts and courage to do it, throw it in and suffer the consequences if necessary, but don't be hiding or pulling in behind somebody's chair like I saw three or four of you do today. It happened on both sides.

Next point. You know, there's a rule in our House that comes from a long-standing parliamentary tradition, and it reads something like this: you cannot do indirectly what you're not allowed to do directly. What that means is that a comment like the Pinocchio comment suggests the L word. I think we're above that. Responding with "Someone's nose is growing" is in the same category. There's one for each side of the House. Let's please keep that in mind. We're not going to allow that or tolerate it going forward.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: I'm anticipating that we'll have a time challenge. Could we ask now, so that we don't interrupt statements, if we could extend past 3 o'clock?

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are running a bit late in the program today. The Government House Leader has asked that if, when 3 o'clock arrives, we're not finished the Routine, we grant unanimous consent to continue. Does anyone feel opposed to that request?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Let's carry on, then, with Calgary-North West.

Anniversary of the Liberation of the Netherlands

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and speak about an important historical anniversary that occurred yesterday, May 5. It marked the 68th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Allied forces. Through the winter of 1944-45 Canadian soldiers battled German forces in the Netherlands until May 5, 1945, when freedom was once again returned to Dutch citizens, including my parents, after five treacherous years of occupation during World War II.

As the tulips, a gift to Canada from the Netherlands, bloom in Ottawa every spring, it is a renewed reminder of the liberation as well as the fact that Canada provided safe harbour to the Dutch royal family during the German occupation. The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery and memorial in the Netherlands is the final resting place of many Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the fight for the Netherlands' freedom.

As the daughter of Dutch immigrants I know how thankful the Netherlands is to Canadian soldiers, and I am so very proud of the eternal bond that has been forged between Canada and the Netherlands after that liberation. We are thankful for their sacrifice, and we will never forget.

New School Construction Announcements

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, last week should have been a great week for the government. They travelled around Alberta

announcing badly needed schools for Alberta students. We support these new school announcements wholeheartedly although a Wildrose government would have built them without going into debt. We would have publicized a prioritized list of all schools requested throughout Alberta so that those who didn't make the cut this time would know how long they will be waiting in line.

Now, if anybody needed a good headline right now, Mr. Speaker, I think we all know it's the government, but somehow they even managed to botch this one. You see, somebody over there thought it would be a good idea to gather little children around for a photo op and then launch into a completely unfounded diatribe against the Official Opposition. The Premier warned the little ones against that evil Wildrose Party: they wouldn't have built any schools; in fact, if they're in charge, they won't build anything at all. Well, I guess that when Alberta adults stop believing you and listening, maybe you reach out to the little ones. Obviously, this was in very poor taste, and what should have been a good-news announcement turned into another communications embarrassment for the government.

You know, it's funny, Mr. Speaker. This government has the largest number of communications and public relations staff in provincial history. There are a lot of people on the public payroll over there. Perhaps somebody should have figured out that using kids as political pawns is not appropriate. In fact, it's quite pathetic. You would think somebody would be fired for this colossal gaffe. My guess, though, is that we're going to have to wait until 2016 for that.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a reminder that it's not customary to raise points of order during private members' statements, nor is it customary to heckle them as they're speaking.

Let's carry on with Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Long-term Cancer Prevention Strategy

Mr. Dorward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. More Albertans aged 35 to 64 die from cancer than heart disease, stroke, other circulatory disorders, infectious diseases, and unintentional injuries combined. Every day 42 Albertans learn they have cancer. By 2030, a short 17 years from now, we expect that to grow to 73 new cancer cases a day. These rising numbers have a significant effect on our communities, health system, our provincial economy, and, most of all, the families and loved ones affected personally.

I'm so proud to see this government invest time and money into reducing and preventing cancer with the release of its new cancer plan to 2030, Changing Our Future. Alberta's cancer plan is about creating a better future, where more cancer is prevented, more cases of cancer are cured, and suffering from cancer is greatly reduced. The plan takes a provincial approach to cancer so that all parts of the system will work together for the best possible outcomes for patients and families.

The plan sets out 10 strategies to complete a comprehensive and co-ordinated system, headed by CancerControl Alberta, a new operating division under Alberta Health Services. It will combine existing resources, Mr. Speaker, so its implementation won't cost taxpayers any more money. The investments that we are making in cancer infrastructure will enable Alberta to be a leader in the fight against cancer. I'm proud to be on the government side, that's not afraid to make a fully funded capital plan in this regard as well.

This government protects our vulnerable and builds the better Alberta that we all want to see for today and for our tomorrows, Mr. Speaker, and that includes a great cancer plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Balwin Community League 50th Anniversary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and privileged to rise today in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Balwin Community League, which will celebrate their five decades of accomplishments with the greater community on June 22, 2013.

The Balwin community is located in the northeast area of our provincial capital between 127th and 132nd avenues and 66th to 82nd streets in Edmonton-Decore. In the early part of the 20th century it was known as Packerstown. This was a rugged, working-class neighbourhood as many families living in the area worked at the nearby stockyards, rendering, and meat-packing plants. Mr. Speaker, Packerstown no longer exists, and in 1910 the area was incorporated as the village of North Edmonton and became part of the city of Edmonton in 1912.

The Balwin neighbourhood is derived from two early property owners, Frank Ball and Luke Winterburn. It was officially founded in 1962 by G.W. Linford and incorporated by the province of Alberta on February 15, 1963.

Over the years the community was the lucky recipient of a new clubhouse, which was donated by a local real estate owner. In 1970 the Balwin community hall was built at 76th Street and 128th Avenue. Seven years later with pride the mortgage was retired thanks to the tireless hard work and commitment of many people who rolled up their sleeves, including the ladies auxiliary, to tackle this goal.

The Balwin Community League has remained active over the years, and most recently, last year, in partnership with the city of Edmonton they completed a refurbishment of Zoie Gardner park.

Congratulations to all those involved who have given so generously to the long-standing success of the Balwin Community League. I know that the families, the community, and the leaders of our city, province, and country are very proud of all the past, present, and future volunteers in the Balwin community. *Heartfelt thanks for adding immeasurably to the lives of children, youth, individuals, and families. Special best wishes for continued success in the many years to come.**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

David Thompson Corridor Visitor Services Program

Mr. McDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the innovative David Thompson corridor visitor services program. Just recently this program won the responsible Canadian energy social performance award, which recognizes CAPP members who have demonstrated innovation and leading performance in their commitment to responsible development of the Canadian petroleum industry. This program builds upon a long-term co-operative relationship between Suncor Energy and Alberta Tourism staff at Crimson Lake provincial park with a goal of raising awareness and fostering stewardship of the provincial parks and protected areas within the David Thompson corridor.

Located in the constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the David Thompson corridor visitor services program, under the leadership of Graham Thursfield, provides opportunities for people to engage in nature-based, hands-on, experiential learning about our incredible natural habitats. The partnership has made this possible by providing funding for a full-time visitor services program, environmental education programs for regional students, the delivery of public interpretive programs, and the establishment of numerous partnerships in support of Alberta parks.

Mr. Speaker, these days Albertans are asking our oil sands industry to take decisive action on global and regional environmental issues, so it's important that we recognize the industry's environmental stewardship and collaborative social initiatives. The award-winning David Thompson corridor visitor services program is an excellent example of the oil sands industry working with our provincial parks system to preserve important ecological areas and provide places where people can enjoy and learn about Alberta's natural heritage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Hehr: Until this government adopts a fair and principled tax code like that famed socialist Brad Wall in Saskatchewan, it seems we will have to turn to the Minister of Alchemy, who possesses the fabled philosopher's stone responsible for the transmutation of lead into gold. How else can we expect to pay for the bundles of promises to bushels of people given by this Premier, which included 50 new schools and 70 renovations? By the way, the Minister of Education admitted last week that this will be another broken promise. If Alberta adopted Saskatchewan's tax code, the second lowest in Canada, this province would bring in an extra \$11 billion a year. We could pay for those new schools. We could also plan to adjust demographic needs.

The education of our children should not be an election promise tied to the price of a barrel of oil. Yes, the Premier announced nine new schools to be built in Calgary, but they will not be completed until after 2016. This does not bode well for our education system. Alberta's K through 12 enrolment is expected to increase by 40,000 students in the next four years. Even with the completion of the Stelmach schools we'll have a shortfall of 17,000 student spaces. What will happen to these students? They'll be crammed into the already sardinelike conditions in our classrooms.

In 1993 this government took away the taxation power of school boards. The corresponding duty is that this government would tax citizens when schools would need to be built. Clearly, this has not happened. Instead of following the advice of virtually every economist or every government report or the advice of former Finance ministers Liepert and Morton to raise revenue, this government would choose to simply turn its back on educating our children.

Failing to modernize our tax system to ensure predictable and sustainable funding and saving for the future leaves the government only one option, to set up a government ministry devoted to alchemy. Otherwise, the system just isn't going to work.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's first report, dated May 2013, entitled Review of the BRIK (Bitumen Royalty-in-Kind) Program. The committee undertook this review on its own initiative in accordance with Standing Order 52.07(2) after considering a number of suggestions put forward by committee members.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all committee members for their contributions during this review, the LAO committee support staff, and the stakeholders who contributed via written submissions and oral presentations. The committee looks forward to receiving the government's response to the recommendations set out in its report within the 150-day period set out in Standing Order 52.09(1).

This report is comprehensive enough, expressive enough, and also thin enough that it will not defend itself against being read, as Sir Winston Churchill so eloquently used to say.

Mr. Speaker, copies of this report are being distributed to all members of the Assembly.

3:00 Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 23 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave today to present on behalf of my hon. colleague the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance Bill 23, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, for first reading.

Bill 23 removes legislation that's no longer needed and amends our personal and corporate income tax acts. It makes adjustments that will maintain consistency with tax law changes made by the federal government to items such as the Canada child tax benefit and the scientific research and experimental development tax credit. Bill 23 also repeals the Alberta Income Tax Act, which was replaced by the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act some years ago. I would encourage all members to support this bill in first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 24 Statutes Amendment Act, 2013

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also beg leave to introduce Bill 24, the Statutes Amendment Act, 2013, on behalf of my hon. colleague the Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 24 is a statutes amendment act, somewhat in the line of a miscellaneous statutes amendment act but differing in that we haven't actually sought opposition approval, so it's not a unanimous consent type of bill. It is a bill which would be open for debate. It's a bill which is essentially compiled of amendments to a number of acts, what I would call one-line or one-page amendments to a number of acts. It amends, for example, the Condominium Property Act in section 38. It amends the Emblems of Alberta Act in sections 2 and 12. It amends the Perpetuities Act in section 3. It amends the Surveys Act in section 4.

It has a number of amendments. The reason why the bill is longer than one might expect is that it has a number of pages of amendments which essentially are just changing the names of ministries from how they are currently expressed in statute to how

they are currently represented, with the names of the ministries that we have now.

It's a relatively straightforward bill amending five acts, with specific changes to sections, and then a number of acts, virtually all of the other acts in the province, with respect to changing the names of ministries and other representations of that nature. A very straightforward bill, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask support at first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's be brief in the introductions of our tablings today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I have tablings on behalf of my colleague the leader of the third party and Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The first is copies of the mayor of the city of Edmonton's State of the City Address on April 2, 2013, in which he specifically talks about the 5 per cent contribution to GDP from the University of Alberta.

The second two tablings were mentioned earlier during an introduction of Heather Workman, who's in the gallery. The first is an article on Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin's call for restructuring of the family law system, and the second is the final report of the Family Justice Working Group of the Action Committee on Access to Justice in Civil and Family Matters, entitled Meaningful Change for Family Justice: Beyond Wise Words.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of.

Mr. Hehr: This is actually on behalf of myself, Mr. Speaker. It's just a letter I referred to last week in the House. It's a letter from the Auditor General, Mr. Merwan N. Saher, regarding his anticipated work that he's going to do and reporting on the change in our budgeting processes and the fact that there's a narrower scope of reporting contained therein.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let me move on to Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Airdrie.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past constituency week I was able to meet with persons concerned about the PDD program. I have the requisite number of copies of 29 letters from parents, providers, grandparents, siblings, community members concerned about the announced cuts and changes to the PDD program.

I also heard from a pharmacist concerned about some things in his letter here.

The oxygen supply changes that are being made are a concern to Ms Janzen and Kelly Clemis.

The parent preschool program, southwestern Alberta, invited me to meet with them. They gave me four letters from Naomi Wiebe, Kathleen Van Herk, Chellsea Jensen, and Nicole Leavitt. I'd like to table those.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter that I received from Mr. Matt Dumais from

Airdrie. Mr. Dumais has multiple sclerosis and spends roughly \$2,500 or sometimes more on prescription drugs every single month. What he's concerned about is that the Alberta College of Pharmacists is trying to get rid of reward programs such as Air Miles at Safeway. He uses those air miles to get to warmer locations to treat his MS and is very worried. This is the fourth or fifth letter I've received in Airdrie alone on this. I would hope that the Health minister would look into this. This seems very anticompetitive and is only hurting MS patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table with you five copies of an Ethics Commissioner report titled Report of an Investigation under the Lobbyists Act Re: Mr. Joseph Lougheed.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Campbell, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, response to Written Question 5, asked for by Ms Smith on December 3, 2012, "Of the transfers received from the federal government, what is the total amount earmarked for health care for aboriginal peoples in Alberta, and where and how were these funds spent during the past three fiscal years?" and response to Written Question 6, asked for by Ms Smith on December 3, 2012, "Of the transfers received from the federal government, what, if any, is the total amount earmarked for housing for aboriginal peoples in Alberta, and where and how were these funds spent during the past three fiscal years?"

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, I believe you had two points of order. Do you want to deal with them one at a time?

Mr. Anderson: Sure.

The Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first point of order relates to our Standing Order 23 (h), (i), and (j). Specifically, if you could look at page 144 of *Beauchesne's*, it specifically notes that accusing someone of slander in this House is unparliamentary language and should not be used. The Premier did in fact accuse the Leader of the Opposition of being a slanderer, of slandering folks over this Daryl Katz investigation by Elections Alberta. Obviously, it is not slander for many reasons, not the least of which is that \$25,000 was found to be in contravention of the act and had to be returned by the PC Party. Truth is a defence, as anybody would know.

In that case, there is no doubt that the complaints made by this Official Opposition leader necessitated an investigation that did in fact find that \$25,000 was illegally donated and had to be returned. It was simply the case that that was certainly not a slanderous accusation. Neither is asking for an investigation into something slander. If every time we're in here, we're going to be accused of slander for doing our jobs, which is to refer matters to the officers of this Legislature, whether that be the Ethics Commissioner or the Chief Electoral Officer and so forth, we're going to be accused of slander a lot because that's our job as Official Opposition, to refer matters that don't meet the smell test, that have issues that may be a problem, to these independent officers to let them do their work.

Not only that, but we did obviously say, Mr. Speaker, that the donation, the bundle amount, was in the form of a \$430,000 bank draft. That actually was proven true in the investigation, once again. It was seen by the Chief Electoral Officer that \$405,000 of that \$430,000 did comply with the act in the Chief Electoral Officer's interpretation. We don't like the policy that allows for that, but to say that we've slandered anybody is unparliamentary and should be withdrawn by that side.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of things, I think, that beg comment there. First of all, it's totally disingenuous for that hon. member to suggest that the finding that one of the donations that was made was made by somebody who was outside the province somehow justifies the comments that they were making, which in no way, actually, were related to that particular fact. Over the course of the last year we can even look in *Hansard* – I believe we'd find it in *Hansard* – at the comments that were made relating to a corporate donation from somebody who was seeking favours and all those sorts of things. I think that whether or not the word "slander" is a parliamentary word that's allowed under *Beauchesne's*, the definition of slander is certainly in what was said.

Time after time the hon. members on that side – and the Premier did not refer today to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I was listening fairly closely. She said that those people over there have been slandering or something to that effect. Quite frankly, what we heard last year was not the appropriate role played by the opposition in standing up, identifying an issue, and asking that it be investigated by the Chief Electoral Officer. No. What they did was day after day slag somebody who is not in this House.

I believe, if I recall correctly, that a number of times they were admonished not to use names of people in the House who were not here. That's another rule that says: do not speak of someone who can't be here to defend themselves. Time after time they used the opportunity to slag Mr. Katz and Mr. Katz's companies and make accusations that somehow the company was making a corporate donation and buying a favour and all that sort of stuff, which is very clearly in the definition of slander, only to discover after the investigation of the Chief Electoral Officer that none of that was true, that none of that was right. The only thing that was found to be a case is not something they commented on at all, that one member who had made a donation actually, although he has offices in Edmonton and spends most of his time here, a lot of his time here, has his official residence or his driver's licence, et cetera, in Ontario.

That one was found to be an illegal donation, not something, by the way, that the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta would have been able to discern. That's something that was found to be a wrongdoing on that person's part, but of course the rules require and the action taken was to return the money, and there was, as I understand it, a letter of admonishment. That's in the Chief Electoral Officer's report.

The appropriate way to go forward on this at the time would indeed have been to say, "We think this looks like something that should be investigated," to write to the Chief Electoral Officer and ask for an investigation. The investigation would have been done. The result would likely have been the same result, and that would have been an appropriate process if they felt that there was a problem. But, no, they brought it to the floor of the House. As you've admonished and as your predecessors have admonished a number of times, political contributions are not a subject for the

floor of the House. They brought it to the floor of the House. They did not actually raise the issue saying, "Here's an issue we'd like to have referred to the Chief Electoral Officer" until they were batted down a number of times for their comments in the House.

So, no, it's not the opposition doing their job. The opposition doing their job would be to take issues that are important to Albertans, put a context around them, ask the questions, and if they believe that there is something that needs to be investigated by an officer of the Legislature, to refer it to the officer of the Legislature for investigation. That's not what they do. They're not doing their job as opposition, quite frankly. They are fearmongering, and they are muckraking, and they are bringing up all sorts of stuff and putting it in the worst possible context and dragging the names of people who are not in this House to defend themselves into the debate.

Mr. Speaker, you might find that slander is a bad word. I've looked; it's in here. It might be a bad word, but all words have to be used in context. The Premier was not accusing the Leader of the Opposition of slandering. What she said was that the behaviour of the Official Opposition over the course of this was slanderous, and I think that's an appropriate description. If you find otherwise, I'd be happy to withdraw it.

But, Mr. Speaker, in the context of this it's important to understand that there is a proper role for opposition. The public does expect that role to be played. It is to ferret out the things that proper questions should be asked on, and it is to ask them properly and deal within a proper context. None of that is what the opposition did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, briefly, I'm sure. Carry on.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Pardon me for interjecting myself into this point of order between the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader, but there are two points that have come up that I think are really important. One is that we are given the privilege of free speech in this House exactly so that anyone, including members of the opposition, even the Official Opposition, may describe circumstances and hold the government to account for it.

The balance to that is that we do have to be careful with that freedom of speech, with that privilege, not to call people names who are not in the Assembly to defend themselves. As far as naming them, just referencing them, I think the government doth protest too much because sometimes you'll need to say someone's name so we all understand who we're talking about. I'm not particularly in this case talking about the gentleman that the Government House Leader raised. That's the balance that we're seeking here.

I find that increasingly the government takes umbrage whenever any member of the opposition wants to criticize the government at all for any reason. That simply is not acceptable, and I know that the Speaker will uphold that free speech and the right of members, including the opposition, to raise situations that we find curious or unacceptable and to demand an answer from the government for that.

Secondly, a number of times recently – and most recently the Government House Leader made reference to the fact that party revenue cannot be raised as a question. In fact, that is not true. In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 504 – and this is under the section that is dealing with questions criteria – it says: concerning "internal party matters, or party or election

expenses." Not revenue. Expenses. I don't think that's a mistake or an omission, Mr. Speaker, because the revenue is important in the context of elections. I'm not commenting on any particular example that may or may not have been raised recently in context with this government receiving money or not receiving money from any particular court, but it is important in the overarching role of democracy that where the revenue comes from in any political party is important, and that's why the wording is there.

I'll also note that this comes up in *Beauchesne's* under 410(17), less specific there: "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities." Nothing about expenses or revenue in that line. If I may use the hon. Government House Leader as an example – and I will give the disclaimer at the beginning that I have no idea whether this is true; I'm just using it as an example. Say that the hon. Government House Leader is also the vice-president of a political party. We would not be able to question him on his political responsibilities, but we can certainly question him on how that might be affecting his job as a minister of X, Y, or Z. I think it's important that we remember these clarifications. The connection between how parties are funded and who's funding them is important, and that's why that express wording has been used.

As well, my first point about the government's oversensitivity to any questioning – it's darn near any questioning now – that isn't brought up by the government as being beyond the pale and outrageous and all kinds of other dramatic statements. I mean, if you can outdramatize me, Mr. Speaker, something is going on here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Airdrie rose on a point of order at 1:57. I think it's important to put a little bit of context ahead of this point of order. We had a comment just moments before to do with Pinocchio, which I've already noted, and we had a response to do with the term "your nose is growing" or words to that effect.

3:20

Then we got into this question from the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition about so-called loopholes, bulk donations, union and corporate donations, and so on. At that point the Premier said the following:

Mr. Speaker, we have a set of rules with respect to election financing that are rules that people can have confidence in. We also have an independent Chief Electoral Officer, who, despite what the opposition says, has not said that anything untoward happened and in fact vindicated the people that this party slandered last year. That's why we have independent offices. The report is clear. No rules were broken, and it's important for us to respect those rules, as we did.

Now, the point of order that has been raised is under 23(h), (i), and (j), and I just want to refresh your memories on what this reads. It says that a member shall be called to order:

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.

So in the strictest sense of the interpretation of that, this was not a comment avowed to any individual member. However, the spirit of that standing order I think is just as important to consider because although it's not a direct allegation against another member, it is nonetheless a reference to a party of which several members happen to be members.

I don't think that it's in keeping with our rules to accuse someone or some party or some other body or entity of slander. So technically while it doesn't fall under that particular ambit of SO 23(h) and (i), I

don't know that it's in the best interest or in the best tradition of this House to use those kinds of statements. The language that has been uttered by various members in this House over the many years that I have been here often comes into question.

So I'm going to ask the Government House Leader if there is an opportunity, as you have offered, to withdraw that particular comment so that we can never have it referenced again. Then we can move on with the rest of the day.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of your words, it would be most appropriate for me to on behalf of the Premier withdraw that comment, and I will undertake to speak to the Premier and indicate to her the extent of your ruling.

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I might say that I have been very reluctant to raise points of order on all of the issues that have been happening in the House with respect to the names that have been called back and forth. We would totally destroy the back and forth in the House if we had a point of order on every breach that's come up in this session. I know you've tried to control the session, but if we cannot call a spade a spade because we want to keep decorum in the House, then I think we'd better keep decorum in the House.

The Speaker: Thank you. That comment has been withdrawn officially.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Under 13(2). I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. You have absolutely got me puzzled. Has the Speaker now ruled that the word "slander" joins the list of unusable language? Because . . .

The Speaker: No. Hon. member, please sit down. [interjection] Please have a seat. It's not the word "slander"; it's the accusation. I think I made that quite clear when I read out the comment. It's the accusation of someone being a slanderer or somebody being a slanderer. I hope that clarifies it.

In any event, we are now done with the points of order. Oh, no. You had one more, Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: You know what? Given that we'll be discussing a motion for a return that deals with the infrastructure priority list, I think I'll withdraw it, and we'll just discuss it then.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That second point of order has been withdrawn, and we're going to move on.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

New School Construction Criteria

Q36. Mr. McAllister:

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

Auditor General Recommendations for Human Services

Q37. Mr. Wilson:

What steps are being taken by the Minister of Human Services and what steps were taken by the previous

ministers of children and youth services to complete the recommendations that were made in the 2006-2007 annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta?

AISH Benefit Extension Costs

Q39. Mr. Wilson:

What are the cost implications on a fiscal year basis to extend assured income for the severely handicapped benefits to those currently receiving benefits beyond the age of 65?

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

Subsidized Daycare Spaces

Q38. Mr. Wilson asked that the following question be accepted.

How many subsidized daycare spaces were available each month in Edmonton, Calgary, and the province as a whole from January 1, 2011, to January 31, 2013?

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to at this time ask the hon. minister, who I believe does have amendments to it, to please table those at this point so that we can move on with the debate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do wish to respond to the question by indicating that we would be prepared to accept the question if it was amended and to move an amendment, which I have discussed with the member who raised the question. I understand that he is okay with the amendment. If that's the case and the House does approve the amendment and the motion as amended, then I actually have the response here for him today. In fact, I'll send him the response even if you don't support it because he asked the question.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would like to move an amendment to the question, that Written Question 38 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "subsidized daycare" and substituting "regulated child care"; (b) by striking out "each month in Edmonton, Calgary, and the province as a whole from January 1, 2011, to January 31, 2013?" and substituting "quarterly in the Edmonton and Calgary child and family service regions and the province as a whole from April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2013, and how many children received child care subsidies quarterly in the Edmonton and Calgary regions and the province as a whole from April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2013?"

The amended question would then read as follows:

How many regulated child care spaces were available quarterly in the Edmonton and Calgary child and family service regions and the province as a whole from April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2013, and how many children received child care subsidies quarterly in the Edmonton and Calgary regions and the province as a whole from April 1, 2011, to March 31, 2013?

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reasons for those amendments are probably clear although I went over them very fast. We can report on the number of regulated child care spaces, which include all program types, including licensed daycare, preschool and out of school care, group family, innovative programs, and approved family day homes, but the question as originally written talked about subsidized daycare. In fact, we don't actually subsidize the daycare spaces; we actually provide subsidies for children, which

is a slightly different distinction. In order to report accurately, we wanted to make that distinction.

The second amendment with respect to monthly and quarterly: there are changes on a month-to-month basis. We actually have reports on a quarterly basis that are more accurate. In the interest of providing accurate information, we report on a quarterly basis.

Then with respect to Edmonton and Calgary those are actually in regions that are a bit broader than Edmonton and Calgary proper. So if it's all right with you, hon. member, we'd rather report on the Edmonton and Calgary child and family services authorities regions as opposed to the cities proper. So these are relatively modest changes that we're proposing.

Then adding at the end of it "and how many children received child care subsidies quarterly in the Edmonton and Calgary regions and the province as a whole" gets back to the initial part of the question about the subsidized daycare spaces but reports it in the way in which we actually do it in terms of child care subsidies rather than subsidized spaces.

I would ask the House to adopt those amendments, and then, as I said, as adopted, I'd be happy to provide the answers.

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

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Services – and I stand to be corrected, which is why I stood – is not the money that is given by way of child care subsidies also given to families that do not participate in an organized child care system but goes directly to families that are caring for children at home? Thus, giving us the number of child care subsidies does not in fact tell us how many spaces there are that are available to people. It tells us how many families are receiving subsidies for some kind of child care, whether it's in a licensed daycare space or whether, in fact, people have opted to take that money and care for their children at home or to have a grandmother or a neighbour care for several children in their home or any number of other possible options. I'll seek clarification on that, please.

3:30

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. I would like to thank the minister for approaching me a couple of weeks ago with this proposed amendment. I advised him that I was prepared to accept the amendment, and I appreciate his co-operation in this matter. I am prepared to ask for the question, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Human Services has moved an amendment to Written Question 38.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Back to the question as amended. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know it's a bit redundant now that the amendment has been passed, but I didn't have the opportunity to speak before because I'd already spoken. But that's one of the reasons why the amendment is necessary. We do not actually subsidize child care spaces. We provide subsidies to children and families, and they can use those subsidies at a

daycare or a day home. I'm not sure that they can use them in their own home, but if they're paying for a day home space or a child care space, they can get those. I can get the information. If the hon. member is interested in what they can use it for and those sorts of things, I'd be more than happy to get that information.

That's actually precisely the distinction here. We don't subsidize daycare spaces. We did support the building of daycare spaces. I shouldn't say that we don't subsidize them because we do insofar as we pay for top-up wages for qualified staff and those sorts of things, but those aren't related to specific spaces. Those are related to the quality of the daycare or the day home itself.

Then with respect to children we support families currently starting at \$50,000 and below in terms of family wages and even between \$50,000 and \$75,000, depending on how many children, to support the cost of them acquiring daycare or care for their children in a number of different places.

I hope that clarifies for the hon. member. If she has any more questions about that, I'm more than happy to get the information.

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

[Written Question 38 as amended carried]

Traffic Ticket Fine Revenues

Q40. Mr. Rowe asked that the following question be accepted.

Which municipalities have not received their full share of eligible fine revenues earned through provincial traffic tickets issued pursuant to the Traffic Safety Act from January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2012, and what is the total amount that was not returned to municipalities across the province because of clerical errors and missed time limits since January 1, 2007?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for this question regarding municipalities that have not received their full share of eligible fine revenues earned through provincial traffic tickets. Unfortunately, I have to reject this as we don't cover that. It's up to municipalities to contact us to determine if they have not received the full amount of their fine revenue. Individual municipalities review their disbursement reports on a regular basis to ensure they're receiving the full amount they are due.

Sometimes, of course, errors can occur, and I'm sure that any errors that do occur are not intentional. For example, if the officer issuing the ticket recorded the wrong location where the ticket was issued or was unclear which municipality the ticket had been issued in, the courts enter in what's recorded on the ticket based on the only evidence that they have in many cases.

For any errors that have been identified, we have made the corrections and provided the revenue to the appropriate municipalities. When these issues arise, Mr. Speaker, Justice and Solicitor General works directly with municipalities to ensure these issues are dealt with on a timely basis. Therefore, with regret I am rejecting this question as previous issues with municipalities have been dealt with in this regard.

I will also add, with respect to this member, that this is not an appropriate use of the written question. If this member knows of any specific concern in any municipality, I invite him to contact my office. I'd be pleased to look into it for him.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to this written question. First off, with respect to the Justice minister saying that this is an inappropriate written question, when the opposition or perhaps a government member puts forward written questions, they actually provide those questions to Parliamentary Counsel. Parliamentary Counsel then approves them as valid questions, or if they're not valid, they send them back, saying that you cannot ask that written question. So for the Justice minister to say that it's not an appropriate question is completely unfounded. This written question was approved by Parliamentary Counsel and is definitely in accordance with the rules and practice of this Legislature.

With respect to the substance of the question this is another example where I think that the government is abdicating its responsibility. If there are any fines that were not transferred back to the municipalities, the government can just say so. If they are unaware of any outstanding amounts, they can simply say so. If they know that amounts have been fully repaid, if there are any errors that have been rectified, they can simply say so. This is not a case of, you know, going through their records and creating new records. They can simply say that to their knowledge, there are none.

This is, I think, another example of the government abdicating its responsibility and then also downloading that responsibility to municipalities and putting the onus on them to identify to the government their errors and omissions. Why should it be up to the municipality to identify errors or omissions on behalf of the provincial government? I think this is well within the provincial government's responsibility and another example of downloading onuses onto municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close debate.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of this question is to provide some information to municipalities who have raised concerns about the collection and reimbursement of fine revenues from the province. Some municipalities have concerns that fine revenue collected through provincial tickets may have been misdirected to the province rather than being directed back to the municipality in which those fines were issued. For instance, one town in my constituency requested an audit of the provincial tickets written by their peace officers. The audit showed that a data entry mistake had been made, and because of this a significant amount of revenue from provincial tickets issued in the municipality was not being forwarded to the town. If this is in fact the case, it is very concerning.

My written question asks the government to be open and transparent and clearly state which municipalities have not received a full share of the fine revenues earned through provincial traffic tickets that they are eligible to receive.

Another concern raised by the town in my constituency who had requested the audit is that when they asked for information from 2007 onwards, they were told that information cannot be provided further back than 2009. The response from the mayor was: "We find this unacceptable and unbelievable as most record retention policies would require that these records be kept up for up to seven . . . years." I also find it quite unbelievable that the government cannot provide information from five or six years

ago. More likely is the fact that the government is simply choosing not to provide that information. So much for the Premier's promise to lead an open, transparent, and accountable government.

In closing, I would like to quote from a letter I received on this issue.

It is our expectation that we trust the Province to provide accurate information, to provide feedback in a timely manner and to correct the mistakes made by the provincial department.

The lack of accountability on the part of the Province raises concerns with other municipalities and the number of possible misdirected fine revenues.

Identifying a problem is a first step to fixing the problem, so I ask that the government undertake to find out how many municipalities have not yet received their full share of eligible fine revenues, which municipalities they are, how much the province owes to each municipality, and table that information in this Chamber so that all municipalities and Albertans can access that information. That shouldn't be the municipality's responsibility; it should be the government's.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has moved acceptance of Written Question 40.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 40 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Stier
Barnes	Hale	Strankman
Bikman	Rowe	Towle
Blakeman	Saskiw	Wilson
Eggen		

3:50

Against the motion:

Allen	Jansen	Quadri
Bhardwaj	Jeneroux	Quest
Calahasen	Johnson, J.	Rodney
Cao	Johnson, L.	Sandhu
Casey	Khan	Sarich
Dallas	Klimchuk	Scott
Denis	Kubinec	Starke
Dorward	Lemke	VanderBurg
Drysdale	Leskiw	Weadick
Fenske	McQueen	Webber
Goudreau	Olesen	Xiao
Hancock	Olson	Young
Horner		

Totals: For – 13 Against – 37

[Written Question 40 lost]

Motions for Returns

Transportation Construction Priorities and Costs

M7. Mr. Barnes moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of the projects itemized in the

Alberta Transportation three-year construction plan, 2012-2015, listed according to priority rather than highway number, with related costs for each project.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government and the hon. Minister of Transportation I would indicate to the House that we reject this motion. There have been a number of times over the course of the last year or so when there's been this question about prioritized lists and then making lists available. Well, I can very easily go to the Transportation website – in fact, I just did – and the three-year construction plan is publicly available on the Transportation website. There's a link right from the main page. I went in there. I found it. It said: three-year transportation plan. I clicked on it, and it comes up with the three-year transportation plan. It's there.

The three-year transportation plan is publicly available. It's listed there. It doesn't need to be the subject of a motion for a return. The rolling three-year plan is reviewed annually and publicly reported with the budget documents.

I think it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta Transportation continually collects data on things like pavement and bridge conditions, traffic volumes, collision data and has experts who analyze that data each year to identify the most appropriate and urgent projects, taking into consideration construction or maintenance costs; reductions in vehicle operating costs; costs associated with travel delays and safety; deliverability, which includes permits, rights-of-way, and local issues; industry capacity; prevailing trends in construction costs; support for new development or increased economic activity in an area; condition of infrastructure; available funding; local consultations; and the best timing for specific improvements.

Suffice it to say that on any given project that's on that list, there are a number of variables that go into play to determine whether or not that project can be advanced and how quickly that project can be advanced. Any one or a number of these factors can change in the course of a year. We look at the whole picture. We update the list each and every year to ensure we're providing value for Alberta taxpayers' dollars.

The second part of the question relates to the question of related costs for each project. Alberta Transportation quite advisedly does not release budgeted costs for each individual project as this would negatively impact the open and public tendering process. If you put a number on a specific project as to what you expect it to cost you, it would be amazing at how close to that number the bids would come in. That doesn't give good value for money – you'd never get a good price that way – and it's not an accountable way to manage taxpayers' dollars. Information that Albertans want, that the road builders, the heavy construction contractors, the consulting engineers, and the municipalities across the province want are all publicly available.

As we go forward with road projects that are on the three-year plan that's publicly listed, as I said, on the Alberta Transportation website, there are a number of factors which determine when they go out for tender and whether they could be built on a timely basis. All the projects that are listed on that plan are important, Mr. Speaker. All of them we intend to do.

The question of the timing and the question of the cost are all as a result of a number of factors, so it would be totally inappropriate to provide a prioritized list of those projects showing numbers that relate to something other than how quickly you can actually get all the variables together and get that project going, and it would be

totally inappropriate to provide a cost for each specific project prior to the tendering process going out to determine what those costs ought to be.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Airdrie, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I wish we could for once in this House, on that side of the House, have an intellectually honest discussion about what we're asking for here. [interjections] This is absolutely the epitome of . . .

Ms Blakeman: Honest or intellectual? Which were you objecting to?

I'm sorry.

Mr. Anderson: No, no, no. I was agreeing with you. It's incredible to think that, you know, maybe we hold them in as high a regard that we can actually have an honest discussion about this.

This government sits there time and time again, looks at the opposition over here, and says: "Okay. What would you cut?" Now, the problem with saying, "What would you cut?" is that in order to understand what we would cut, to know what we would cut by only building \$4 billion of infrastructure as opposed to the \$5 billion that the government wants to build, which is the case – they're building \$5 billion of infrastructure; we're saying \$4 billion – there would need to be a prioritized infrastructure list which not only shows what is going to be built but what is on the list going forward, what requests have been made but are not going to be built by government going forward, the order of priority not only for the projects that were approved but also the projects that are not yet approved. If they would just do that, Mr. Speaker, we would all know what the difference in our infrastructure plans would be.

But they say: "Well, you guys just have to tell us. You just have to tell us what you're going to not build." Well, we do not have the resources of government. We don't have people sitting on the side of the road with a clipboard tracking every car that goes by on the road or have the ability to have people go out and see whether there needs to be maintenance on a certain road or have hundreds of people working in the government bureaucracy to decide which projects should be fast-tracked for safety reasons and which ones can wait a couple of years. We don't have, obviously, the government resources to do that. What we need is the same thing that the public needs, which is the government to be open and transparent about that process, to make a prioritized infrastructure list and to put it on the website and make sure that we know not only the projects that have been approved but the ones that haven't yet been approved.

In the Wildrose 10-year capital plan, this is one of the things that we propose, and it will be one of the very first things that we do if we are elected in 2016, put out an infrastructure priority list. We would break it into four envelopes, Mr. Speaker. There would be health care infrastructure, health and seniors' facilities infrastructure; education infrastructure; roads, the highway network and so forth; as well as other, things like museums, cultural facilities, recreational facilities, and so forth. We'd break it into those four envelopes. We would make sure every request – let's use the Education file as an example. We would look at every single request that came in from the many different school divisions across the province, because they all submit to government a priority list for their school board that they've come up with, with access to information that they have about their needs and so forth.

4:00

Now, at that point they send it in, and the government probably receives – I don't know the number because it's not published, obviously. That's why we're here. But they probably receive a thousand requests for a school – I'm just throwing a number out there – a thousand new school and maintenance requests. Okay. Great. Then they go and announce like they did this past week 17 lucky winners. Was it 17 or 20? What was it? I can't remember, but whatever it was, the 17 or 20 schools, they announced it. The other people, the other 900 requests for schools on that list or 500 or 300, have no clue where they are on the list. They have no idea where they are.

People say: oh, well, they know because they submit lists. No, they don't. Edmonton public and Calgary public don't know where the schools that they put forward are. They know where they are in ranking according to other schools within their own school division, but they don't know where they are with regard to priority in comparison to the schools requested by Calgary Catholic, Calgary public, Edmonton Catholic, Rocky View school division, Red Deer, and so forth. They don't know.

That's the point of the prioritized infrastructure list. Put all those schools, all those requests into the pot. Then all those wonderful, smart people in the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Infrastructure or the Ministry of Health and so forth can prioritize all of those requests, one through 500 or a thousand or whatever it is, and say that number one is the most needed, all the way down to the least needed.

Then what we would do is that we've said that a certain amount of that money, that \$4 billion, would be put towards new schools. Whatever it is. Say that it's a billion dollars; say that it's a quarter of it. So we put a quarter of it into the Education file. Then you would be able to see exactly or very closely – of course, you have to tender it and so forth, but you'd be able to make a very educated guess as to which projects would be built under a Wildrose government with that \$1 billion and what would be built by the PCs or the NDPs or the Liberals, whatever they say they are going to spend on Education infrastructure projects. It would be open. It would be transparent. Everybody would see it.

But the government doesn't do this. They don't do it for schools. They don't do it for roads. Oh, they publish a request sheet. It's in order according to highway number. Wow. That's fantastic. We've got it in order for highway number. How about in order of priority? We don't know what the priority is. We have no idea what the priority is because the government won't put an infrastructure priority list for roads out there. Sure, they have what they're going to build in the next three years, but what about beyond that? Communities are trying to build their infrastructure and are trying to plan smartly for growth, and a lot of that growth is going to be contingent on whether they get support for a provincial project, for a school, for a health facility, for a road.

They can't plan like that, Mr. Speaker, because they don't have a ruddy clue what's coming down the pipeline, and they don't know when they're going to get it. They are told: "Oh, it's on the five-year list. It's on the 10-year plan. It's on the seven-year plan. It's on the six-month plan." Who knows where it's at? No one knows where their project is unless it's in the specific budget for that year or for the three-year infrastructure plan, and even the three-year infrastructure plan can be adjusted quite a bit, so something that's on there doesn't necessarily get built in the three years. I think most of us who have been here longer than a couple of years have had that happen to us.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, let's take Beaumont. I know for a fact and you know for a fact that Beaumont needs a new school.

They really need a new school. Well, I didn't see Beaumont in the new school announcement. I thought Beaumont was one of the highest needs areas in the entire province. That's what the data seems to suggest. That's what has been suggested in this House by the Education minister and others. Yet they weren't on the list. Okay. Maybe there's a legitimate reason. I'm not saying it was political, but the people of Beaumont don't know that.

What could have happened is that they could have been number 10 on the list and somebody might have said: "You know what? Ah, we don't really need a school in Beaumont. Let's put it here. This is a more politically hot area over here. Why don't we make sure that that MLA gets their school so that they can announce it, and then Beaumont can wait another year?" Maybe that's not what happened. I don't know. Nobody does because the list is not printed.

The criteria by which things are prioritized in the government is also not printed. They have some vague, "Oh, you know, it's need, and it's maintenance, and it's da, da, da," but they don't have any formula. They don't have any waiting system, any kind of public document that, frankly, could even be audited. It's all just conjecture and feel-good stuff. It's ridiculous to do it this way, it's incompetent to do it this way, and it's wrong to do this way.

It's also very frustrating. I think I do understand. I know the government won't like this, but I do understand because of my opportunity to sit there for two years and to be able to be on that side of the aisle. I know for a fact that politics does come into play when it comes to infrastructure funding. I know that because when I was with caucus, Airdrie was in high need of a school, many schools, actually.

Mr. J. Johnson: You got the schools.

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. We did get the schools. Absolutely. Very good.

But in 2008, pre-election, roughly 30 schools were announced, and Airdrie was not one of the schools even though it literally doubled in size in a 10-year period. It didn't get the announcement of schools. But there were roughly 10 in Edmonton, the exact same number in Calgary, and then the rest were spread around.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of things that come to mind for me when I look at the government's rejection of this request. There's a request for a prioritized list of Alberta Transportation's three-year construction plan, 2012-15, listed according to priority rather than highway number. This strikes me as entirely reasonable and also doable despite the Government House Leader's protests.

Part of the reason that I know it's doable is the government's very own ministry business plan, Budget 2013: Responsible Change. On page 70 of Transportation's business plan under performance measure 2(a) is the physical condition of provincial highway surfaces. The last actual was in 2011-12. Then there's a target for '13-14, '14-15, and '15-16. So the government must know which highways they're going to build or fix, or they wouldn't be able to do the allocation that they have done here. They're able to tell us that the percentage of highways in good condition, which was last determined in '11-12, is 58.6 per cent. But, in fact, that is going to go down so that by 2015-16 only 52 per cent are expected to be in good condition.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the government knows what their priority list is, or they wouldn't be able to make this kind of a statement in

their business plan. They're able to say the percentage in fair condition. This is slightly better news, by the way. The last actual for that in '11-12 was 26.8 per cent, and it is expected to go up to 30 per cent. So 30 per cent of the provincial highway surfaces are expected to be in fair condition. But the very last category is bad news again because the percentage of highway surfaces expected to be in poor condition, the last check mark, is 14.6 per cent. It gets worse because they're expecting 16.5 per cent to be in worse condition in '13-14, 17 per cent to be in poor condition by '14-15, and 18 per cent to be in poor condition by 2015-16.

Clearly, the government knows what they're fixing and what they aren't, or they wouldn't be able to make that kind of a projection for which highway surfaces are going to get better or how many are going to get better or what percentage is going to get better and what percentage is going to get worse. So they have the information.

4:10

I was really interested in listening to the Government House Leader and the objections he was putting forward or his criteria for rejecting this request. He went into a long list of people that use these statistics and seemed to be saying that, well, what others would wish for or wish information for is somehow a factor in answering a request from the Official Opposition. He seemed to be saying – and he's welcome to get up and argue with me on this one, of course, Mr. Speaker – that, you know, if the Alberta transportation network or the contractors association or whoever isn't interested in this information, then the opposition doesn't get it either. It was a very convoluted argument, so I don't accept that either.

He also mentioned that, you know, how could they possibly know all the timelines and when supplies would come and what the season – I'm assuming that the seasons would affect the timelines in building things. How could they possibly give a prioritized list? Well, really? The government is telling us that they don't know how long it takes to build a highway? I'm pretty sure they can tell me within a couple of days how long it takes to build a kilometre of highway in southern Alberta, central Alberta, and northern Alberta. They've been doing this for a while. If they're not keeping statistics, we're all in trouble. That's what we expect government to do is to be able to cover that kind of thing. To say, "Oh, we don't know how much the supplies will cost or how long it'll take to come," well, okay. Yeah. If you're going to be ordering supplies from – what's the most recent thing that happened here? They ordered steel from Quebec instead of using local companies. Does anybody else on this one remember what it is they're doing?

Mr. Eggen: For the proposed arena. Bidding for the proposed arena.

Ms Blakeman: Are you serious?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, for God's sake.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: I'm so sorry, Mr. Speaker. Okay. So that's actually the city of Edmonton's fault, not the government's. Okay. I won't blame you for that one, then. I'll take that back.

It's just beggars belief that the government doesn't know how long it takes to do, you know, any given stretch of highway or how long it takes to get the supplies or even how much seasonal time they have to build it. I mean, please. The government loves to tell us how long they've been in power, and then they turn around and say: "Yeah, but we weren't paying attention. We didn't keep any statistics, and we have no clue how long this takes." Ah, nah. That one doesn't work.

I'm not saying that the government is doing this, but I am certainly laying out that it is quite possible to do it, which is why you want the kind of transparency that's being asked for. Without a prioritized list, it does allow the government to electioneer using projects. They can go into a community they're not doing well in or, gosh, that was won by another party and say, "We are going to promise you a school and a highway and a bridge and an arena and all kinds of things," all of which may well be on the list. But if you don't have to publish that list in any way, nobody is able to say: "No, no, no, no. Hold it. You promised a school to us." What's the other one somebody was talking about here? Airdrie, I think, wanted a school, and they got it. You know, if that transparent list isn't there, then the government can in fact use it for electioneering and should not be able to.

I'm not saying whether they do or don't. I'm just saying that if we really want transparency here, the best transparency is open data, and an openness that says: yes, this is the prioritized list, and we can do it in three-year increments, three, five, 10, 20. That would be fine. It does allow communities to do better planning around when that disruption might be happening, when they could maybe work out a deal to have additional work done in their town with the same contractor, et cetera, et cetera. It also allows everyone else to hold the government to account if they start promising the world during an election time. Well, they wouldn't be able to do that if there was a prioritized list, so it does also save the government from any accusations of that ilk.

The last piece, Mr. Speaker, is the increasing reliance on private contractors for the maintenance of highways. I know that a while ago Parkland did a paper, *Delivery Matters, 2013*, on infrastructure maintenance. They do go through how to figure out whether or not this government is maintaining our assets – that is, our infrastructure – the bridges, the schools, the hospitals, the highways. There's money put into that. It's a physical thing. It's worth something. We could sell it if we needed to, but we're not going to sell it. We can put a price on it, and it absolutely is an asset. Here was Parkland looking to say: okay; well, how do we know whether the value of it is being maintained?

As I just pointed out to you in that business plan, which is the government's own ministry business plan, they know that there is going to be a degrading of the highway surfaces over a period of time. That they'll admit to. But when you're trying to find out, you know, how well any given area is being maintained, if it's a private contractor, all of a sudden you're into that gigantic loophole in FOIP that is called third party. They won't release the information unless the third party gives permission to release it, and really, Mr. Speaker, very, very, very few third parties will agree to release that information. That's a lack of transparency on behalf of the government as well.

As we get into more and more P3s from the government and those sorts of arrangements, we never get to see the bids that come in, we don't get to see the contracts that are signed, and we don't get to see any kind of performance measurement that goes on. First of all, well, it's a private, closed-bid process, and you can't

see the bids because of that. Then we're into FOIP because there's a contract with the government and the private operator.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and talk about this issue. As somebody who also went onto the Alberta Transportation website – I took the hon. House leader's advice and went on there. I went and took a look. On there it says, first of all, that it's a tentative list, so there's nothing clear about that. Then it goes on to list them in order. It absolutely does list them in order, but it lists them in order of highway name – for example, highway 63 – and then it goes through a series of numbers, highway 790, highway 587. It lists them in order of the highway name.

In no way, shape, or form does it say in which order each highway would be dealt with. It doesn't say where they're at on the list. It doesn't say what the priority is. It doesn't say what the priority isn't. It doesn't say what the tentative timeline is. It doesn't say anything about costs. It doesn't say where they're at in the process. So a tentative major construction project list is nowhere near a public prioritized project list like the opposition has been asking for, like every single Albertan has been asking for, and like every single municipality, every single school board has been asking for. Mostly Albertans just want to know where their needs fit on the list.

I would go so far as to say that almost every single Albertan understands that the needs change in this province. We all are very, very clear that what might be the priority this year could change next year. I think Albertans said that loud and clear when we saw the tragedies of highway 63. After those seven people died on highway 63, I don't think there was anybody who said: "No, no, no. Don't do anything up there because I want my stop sign first before you do anything with highway 63." I think it was made clear across this province that they wanted to see highway 63 become a priority, and the Wildrose would have made highway 63 a priority as well.

When you go through this list, it starts off with – and I'm looking at the very first page – highway 1. Then it says, under location, "4 Km W of Bow Valley Trail – 1 km E of Hwy 1X (selective near Canmore)"; type of work, "Preservation/Overlay"; estimated length, 39 kilometres. That's what it says. That's directly from the Ministry of Transportation's website. The Minister of Infrastructure consistently sends us back to this list and says to us every single day when we ask the question about projects that it is published. It's not public. It says the highway. It says the location. It says the type of work and estimated length. It says nothing about the priority.

4:20

Are the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Infrastructure saying that everything to do on highway 1 is the priority, so we'll start with number 1, and we'll work all the way through the numbers until the end? I'm sure he's not. Or is he saying that within highway 1 all the way up to highway 890 or whatever it goes to there's prioritization of those projects? I'm sure that there is. That would only make sense.

Now, there's no reason not to tell the public what those prioritizations of those projects are. For example, the very second line says, again, under highway, highway 1, location, "Hwy 9 – 1 km E of

Hwy 817 (E of Calgary)"; type of work, "Preservation/Overlay"; estimated length, 21 kilometres. In no way, shape, or form does this website state that the second item has more priority than the first item. It doesn't even say if it has any priority. It doesn't say where it is in the process. It's in the tentative government-owned transportation projects near completion, under way, or scheduled in 2013-2016. If you couldn't get any more vague, it wouldn't be clearer than that.

If you scroll down, if you continue down the list – again, like I said, it goes: highway 1, highway 1A, highway 1X, highway 2, and it goes consecutively all the way down until it ends at the number of highways that are within that three-year span, but nowhere on there does it say anything about the priority of it. For example, under highway 43, which is six pages into the list, it says: "E of Crooked Creek – W of Sturgeon Lake IR 154," "Twinning – Grade, Base, Stage Paving," 17 kilometres. Where is that in the priority list? What stage is that at? Is it a number one priority? Is it a number 101 priority? Is it the third priority? Is it going to come before 63? After 63?

I'll even go to my own riding, where we're getting some paving. We're very happy for that, but, for example, highway 587, which is in my riding: "9 km W of Hwy 766 – 7 km E of Hwy 766 (SW of Innisfail)," "Preservation/Overlay," 16 kilometres. That is on page 11 of 16. Again, it doesn't say anything about priority anywhere in the document.

The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Infrastructure consistently tell the opposition: "Go to the website. It's laid out. The priorities are there. Albertans know exactly where they stand with every project." No, they don't. They just know that these projects are listed here. If any one of them drops off, we don't know why. We don't know what bumped them, and I think Albertans want to know that. Nobody is asking for some sort of really detailed, ooh, secret list. In your own ministry clearly you have a priority of which projects you're allotting the money to, and that only makes sense. We're just asking: why not let all of Alberta know that?

This government constantly talks about being open and transparent and always telling Albertans exactly where they stand, but what you have with this list is that when somebody gets bumped off the list, the community is never told why they got bumped off the list or why something became more important. I think that if most communities knew that they had to wait, you know, that they were number 10 on the spot and may be moved up to number 8 or moved down to number 12, they would understand that because they would understand that clearly there is a prioritization, and there would be criteria for how that prioritization is applied.

For the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Infrastructure to consistently go back and tell the opposition all the time that it's on the website – Albertans have been on your website. It's not there. I would encourage the Minister of Infrastructure to actually look at the website and explain to me how it's prioritized. If it's prioritized by highway number, then great. Let us know that. But if he's not going to say that, then there is no priority allotment to this.

Now, the Minister of Infrastructure, you know, shakes his head at me and thinks I'm acting all strange and all that kind of thing to ask for a prioritized list. Well, he can do that, but this isn't me asking for this list. These are constituents in the province of Alberta who are saying to the Minister of Infrastructure: "I go to your website. I don't see a priority listed to any of these projects." If I'm confused about that, Minister of Infrastructure, I'm more than willing to have you sit down with me and educate me on how your website works, and if there's some sort of interactive part of

this that I'm not understanding, I'm certainly more than willing to do that. But I've sat down with Albertans. They don't see a priority on this list, and I'm sure the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Transportation don't either.

Now, if you go even further than that, we know that Alberta Health Services and we know that the school boards are expected by the government to submit a prioritized list to the government. They put their capital projects in order of priority. They put it over a plan of three and five years, and they submit to the government what is the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, 10th priority. They literally go through and submit that list to the government. Then the government takes that list.

The Minister of Education has explained quite clearly how it works for him, and I think he gave a very good explanation. He talked about how they take the needs of the school boards, and then they take a look at growth in the province, and they come up with the priorities that they're going to build schools in. I think that if that's the way you're going to do it, then that's fantastic. But why not make that known to everybody? Why not let every school board know that when they submit the list, they're to go through this formula, and they're going to work together to figure out what the priorities are for each local school board and then what the priorities are of the province, and you come together and have consensus and then make it public?

Then to go even further than that, Alberta Health Services does the same thing. We know Alberta Health Services submits their capital request, and we know Alberta Health Services has different capital requests than what the government's priorities are. We've seen it. We've known that Foothills hospital has a situation with mould in the kitchen. It's been on the list to be fixed for years. You know, that kitchen has been in place since 1960. This government claims to have a priority for home-cooked meals. That's yet to be seen, but they claim to have that, yet we have a kitchen at one of our major, major hospitals that has mould in it. It didn't even make it onto the Alberta Infrastructure list, and nobody knows why. Nobody knows when it will make it onto the Alberta Infrastructure list. No idea, none at all.

The same with the building of hospitals. Why not make it public? Why not have community input into that? Why not share with Albertans exactly what the process will be for developing infrastructure in the province of Alberta?

Now, the Minister of Infrastructure, every time we ask a question like this, often says: go to the website. I've said that already. When you go further down the website . . . [Mrs. Towle's speaking time expired] Perfect.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a brief comment on this motion, that I find very interesting because, of course, when we talk about infrastructure projects, we're not just dealing with roads. Really, there are a whole range of projects that are being promised or prioritized to be built by the Crown. Then it's a question of when they're going to start with the construction and when we might see them come to fruition and in which order.

I think it's a practical suggestion by the hon. member that we should have a prioritized list because, of course, capital projects such as roads and buildings take a long time to go through various stages of planning, and there are many other investments that can take place around that capital project, especially of roads, that might involve other economic interests. If we know that a road is

going to be upgraded so that larger and heavier trucks might be able to use it, for example, Mr. Speaker, then this is a means by which different resources or industries might pursue and develop economic interests based on the availability of that road. Right? If a road is upgraded so that heavier trucks can be used, you could have some economic development anywhere along that road, for example. It's a practical way that not only the individuals in the constituencies can look to see where their infrastructure is going, but also it's a way by which our economy can make long-term plans for the future.

I know that in my own personal experience before I became an MLA and was a teacher, I did pave roads as well as part of my jobs in the summer for university. I know for a fact that they do make those long-term plans with construction companies, paving companies for two, three, four, five years in advance – right? – and indeed over the lifetime of a road in terms of its management and its upkeep there is a schedule by which, you know, a road might be upgraded or maintained over time. In a way, this is information that we could probably discern using some kind of detective skills that highway 22 needs to be paved on a five-year regime. If you're being responsible stewards of that Crown infrastructure, then you should pave it during that time. I mean, really, it would take a lot of the mystery out of this process if we could in fact see that prioritized list made public on the website.

4:30

You know, we're not asking to put this prioritized list and write it in stone. Indeed, we're writing it electronically on the Internet, and we know that things do change, right? We have changes in plans. We have changes in our assets, changes in our revenues that might determine that that prioritized list would change. I don't think Albertans would take offence to that. Certainly, the level of transparency even with a list that does change over time being available to the public I think would trump the sort of cone of silence that we have to live under now in not seeing which projects are prioritized or, indeed, how they do go on or fall off that same list.

You know, we know that building infrastructure, particularly roads, and other projects is on three-, five-, or even 10-year cycles, so it's a bit ridiculous to presume that we can't figure that out as members of the Legislature or members of the public. Again, I won't reiterate to a great extent what others have already said in regard to the depoliticization of building capital projects in certain places and using certain timing, but we all know that that does happen.

I think that as we seek to change the way we do politics and increase the transparency and the democratization of the politics that we practise here in the province of Alberta, this would be a nice step so we could see when the road is going to get paved or not get paved, which order it's in, and people can make judgments about that. But if we have it behind this drapery that we pull forward or we pull back – and the curtain is drawn at this point – and if we see a sudden flurry of capital projects being pulled out from behind that curtain, let's say, in the last year before an election, then that adds to this sense of cynicism and confusion about good government and wise choices based on need rather than political issues, right?

I mean, the same thing extends to schools, to health centres, to all sorts of capital projects that we need and would like to see. For me as the critic currently for K to 12 education the new school list is very interesting and very relevant to people. You know, we saw a flurry of announcements last week, which were great, in regard to some new schools. Like, I mean, what happened? What was the process, and why were these choices made? We could even extend

that to the portables and the modularity that are required to help our schools meet the needs of our growing population.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, as we drive along the dilapidated roads that we see not just in Edmonton but all across the province, it reminds us daily, I think, of the contrast between what we are told is the wealth that we live amongst and live with here in the province of Alberta, the discrepancy between that and what we see when the rubber hits the highway, so to speak. We could do a lot better; we could have infrastructure that's in keeping with our growing population and with our growing economy. You know, Edmontonians are faced with that every day when we smash our way through potholes and so forth. I know that we could do a lot better, and we could see in a more transparent way across the province how that infrastructure is being doled out and, hopefully, being doled out based on need, based on a schedule of maintenance, a schedule of capital investment.

I think that everyone would benefit from that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to this motion

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of the projects itemized in the Alberta Transportation three-year construction plan, 2012-2015, listed according to priority rather than highway number, with related costs for each project.

As the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, my colleague, has mentioned, I think this is a pretty reasonable request. A prioritized list makes a lot of sense. It should be standard operating procedure, I submit. Citizens have a right to know. Jurisdictions certainly need to know. They need to know when their projects are going to be approved and when they're likely to be built. Their citizens require it of them, and they require that for good governance in managing their own time and resources. They need clear criteria about why their project may be where it falls on the prioritized list. Of course, they'd like it to be fast-tracked and be as close to the top of the list as possible. That's human nature.

It also may be reality. If they know what the criteria are and if those criteria are clear and transparent, then they can tweak their request or they can make the point a little better about what the government seems to think or the Transportation department in this case might think are the important factors that they are considering when they're making their decisions and making that prioritized list. They could tweak their pitch, so to speak.

Without this clear, transparent prioritized list with the reasons or the criteria, the government comes under a cloud of suspicion, as has been alluded to, that the government uses projects and project approval as a bit of a club. And as someone who has been on village council as a mayor and as a councillor and maintains relationships with other councils and councillors today, of course, because I now represent a riding that has counties and MDs in it and many community councils, there is a sense that if they don't – I don't know. Is “kiss up” allowed, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Bikman: All right. Great. I don't know what's allowed and what ain't. Right?

You know, they feel like they kind of have to kiss up. We won't say where because that probably isn't allowed. Nevertheless, there's a sense that they are under some threat, that if they vote left instead of right, they might come out on the short end of the stick, so to speak. There is a sense that the government may be

using this to keep the voters in line, to keep the population a little more under control and dependent.

Now, I don't believe in entitlements, generally, but I think Albertans are entitled to know where their projects are on the list and why and what they need to do to keep their project moving up the list. Budget estimates on projects are just that: estimates. It would be all right to share how your engineers and your people have costed out a project. Surely, they're doing it. I can't imagine they're suggesting a project without first taking the time to count the cost, as an ancient Middle Eastern proverb suggests is the wise approach to take.

I believe, quite candidly, in the free enterprise system. I believe that in a free market, even with an estimated cost of a project, if there's a clear, transparent, open, fair bidding process that is not designed to eliminate some bidders and tilt the table in favour of some other bidders, then I think that the prices and costs would actually come down. That's a problem that we do have in Alberta. Projects that we build do go over; we know that they go over cost. I can't imagine that we've had a project built in our province in the last decade or two that actually came in under budget. If we did, I'm sure we'd all like to know about it because if we knew that it happened, we might be able to see how it happened and why it happened and replicate that desirable outcome.

As it is right now, I have a sense and there is a sense from conversations that I've had that things are just never quite on a level playing field. The bidding and tendering process, when it occurs – of course, we know it hasn't occurred with regard to power line construction. If we did have a level playing field for the bidding, then I think we would be very pleasantly surprised at how much more we could accomplish with our taxpayers' dollars. Remember; it's taxpayers' money that we're spending. We're not spending our own money; we're spending the taxpayers' money. Having open, published, transparent lists that are prioritized would require us to be better stewards, would require the government to be a better steward.

I think that all we're asking for with this request is for the government to be transparent and accountable. Well, I'll bet it would even start a transformation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

4:40

Mr. McIver: I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. You know, I hear things about: it's the taxpayers' dollars. I agree with that. They are the taxpayers' dollars, and that's exactly why we're operating the way we are. We're respecting the taxpayers' dollars in trying to get them a good deal. If we were to go ahead with this, essentially what the opposition is asking us to do is to hand the taxpayers' wallets over to the contractor and say: “Well, here's all the money we have. Please don't take it all, but do the work.”

We're actually putting them in a competitive situation where they have to try to undercut their competitors, get the work while underpricing other people. Of course, if we put out in the first place the budget that we have to work with, it takes away that protection for the taxpayers. Actually, to talk about supporting this particular question in its current form and talk about protecting the taxpayers is completely diverse, separated by 180 degrees. So that's why we're rejecting the question.

Further, in terms of the priority list, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that everything that we're funding is on the website, as mentioned by some of the hon. members across, and everything that isn't funded isn't on the website. It was mentioned that people need to know ahead. They know three years ahead what we're planning on

funding. Would they have us tell people a hundred years ahead? No, actually I don't think the opposition would have us tell people what we're going to build a hundred years ahead because that would be ridiculous. All we're really talking about here is degree. We tell them three years ahead. At some point it doesn't become useful anymore.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when people talk to me about what's on the funded list, they say, "Is my project funded, or isn't it?" You know what I don't hear: am I number 15 instead of 17? I never hear that. They want to know: is it funded, or isn't it funded? If it's not funded, they sometimes will say, "Why not?" and we talk about that we have to set priorities, which is exactly the fact. Whether something funded is 15th or 17th is irrelevant, and if something is unfunded, whether the first unfunded or the 10th unfunded, it isn't relevant either except for the fact that it would introduce one element that the opposition says they don't want. They don't want politics.

Well, if you want politics, what you want to do is release a list that says that this is one, two, three, four that aren't funded. It would give people hope that they could get in. It wouldn't work because we're objective in how we do these things and try to do the projects that give the best value for Albertans first, but it would really inspire people, good people that have a reason for wanting these projects, to come forward and say: if I could just politic a little harder, maybe I can get it moved up the list. We actually decide on the projects not on the basis of politics but, rather, on the basis of need, on how we'll get the best value for Albertans, how we'll deliver the most infrastructure that will do the most good for Albertans.

You know, the folks over there even talked about worrying about whether people are going to get fair treatment. One example was mentioned in the House. Six schools were announced the other day. Four of them were in nongovernment ridings. It's just because that was where the need was. That's how we do things here, and that's how we intend to keep doing them.

In order to serve Albertans best, protect the taxpayers' interests – the question, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, is contrary to those things, which is why we will reject it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief here as well. You know, it's one of these things where I think it was in the throne speech where the Premier put forward her vision for this province of having an open and transparent government. What could be more open and transparent than publicizing a priority list for transportation projects? Put out the list; put out the expected costs. I think taxpayers would forgive the government if there were overruns due to unforeseen factors or factors that were beyond the control of government.

This is where we could then see. If you had a prioritized transportation list or infrastructure list, you could say: this project is a priority for certain reasons, and this isn't. You could see, for example, some of the rationale of why MLA offices are at the top of the priority, at the very top for this government. A rooftop garden is apparently one of the top priorities for this government, to create this rooftop garden on top of brand new MLA offices, or a movie theatre, or something like that. We need to see . . .

Mr. Anderson: You get a movie theatre.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah, you get a movie theatre in this new MLA office. It's quite outstanding, actually, that taxpayer dollars are wasted on that.

You know, I applaud the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for putting forward this motion for a return. What it would do is allow all Albertans to see what the priority list is for this government over the next three years. Instead of spending the week making announcements and berating the opposition in front of I think it was kids in grade one – that was the tactic that this Premier decided to take when she made these announcements – what we could do is something positive. We can have this government put forward a public, open, transparent, prioritized infrastructure and transportation list so that all Albertans can see what has taken place.

I think that the Minister of Transportation may have just forgotten that the city of Calgary has a prioritized and open and public and transparent transportation and infrastructure list. I don't know if it's been a year or two or whatnot, but I think that the member should take a look at what was done in the city of Calgary and maybe take those good lessons learned there to the government of Alberta.

Apparently what happens is that once you get elected with this government, some of that knowledge of the past and some of those principles that were espoused in the past just kind of – poof – go away. They're not brought forward. Sometimes after people leave government – we saw Ted Morton espouse a whole bunch of principles after he left government, but when he was in government, they weren't there. Poof. They go. Mr. Speaker, in these circumstances let's have a principled approach, have an intellectual discussion, and have this put on the website.

I don't know what *Hansard* is going to do with "poof." I think they can put that in there but probably not the inclinations.

Mr. Speaker, let's do something right here. Let's have the Premier for once keep a promise. It would be, you know, a big thing if she kept a promise of being open and transparent and actually provided an itemized list in Alberta Transportation for the next three years. Keep a promise for once. It would be outstanding. I think that Albertans would be surprised that a promise was kept, but it would be outstanding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of this motion for a return, and I'd hope the government would reconsider its position. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I'm asking for is a simple request for the government to provide the list of its priority projects for the Department of Transportation. It is important. I've heard time and time again from the people in the construction industry that it is so difficult to effectively plan their men and their capital because projects come on and off the government's lists on what seems like a random basis.

Road builders have told me about times when Alberta Transportation pulled a considerable amount of roadwork without warning and that there was no consistency in the project planning. This, of course, makes contractors financially nervous. What can happen in that case is that they may try to capitalize the cost of their equipment over one year's projects rather than the five or 10 years' worth of work that the equipment and capital would last because they have no faith in the government's list, because they have no faith in the government following through on the amount of work that is planned. This is also true for employees, our tradespeople, and the importance of the capacity in our industry so that we can maintain the proper pricing that's required. Of course, it's the taxpayers who lose out in this scenario.

A priority list would provide certainty to contractors, allow them to plan ahead better, and in turn provide the best value for taxpayers' dollars and citizens of Alberta. Yet every time the government is asked to provide its priority list for transportation projects in Alberta, the minister says that a priority list is on the Alberta Transportation website. As almost everyone has said, however, it is not a prioritized list. It is, in fact, a three-year tentative list. A tentative list. When we compared 2011 to 2012, many things came off the list without being done, without an explanation as to why they weren't done. In one case, highway 61 in my constituency, half of the highway was done and not the other half, no explanation, and it goes on and on. The document on the Alberta Transportation website is titled 2013-16 Tentative Major Construction Projects list.

4:50

Also, during debate on the Transportation estimates when I asked the Minister of Transportation to release a priority list of what highways the government is going to work on and in what order they will be done, the minister responded:

The priority list is available, as I've told the hon. member before. He's clearly decided to ignore the advice. It's on our website. If he goes to transportation.alberta.ca, he will find the three-year capital plan there, the priorities that are approved.

I pointed out to the minister that the priority list he referred to on his department's website is a tentative list, first of all. In fact, as the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake mentioned, all the items but particularly the first five items on the list are all projects on highway 1. This is, of course, because the tentative list of projects is only arranged by highway number. The first seven projects on the list are on highway 1. It makes us all wish we lived on highway 1. Then there are 36 references to highway 2, followed by three references to highway 2A, then highways 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11 are mentioned and on and on.

Since the minister said that this is his priority list, I asked him if those first five projects listed on highway 1 are, in fact, the government's top five priority projects for the Department of Transportation. His response was: "I don't have a top five." Clearly, the tentative Alberta Transportation three-year construction plan is not a priority list. Although the minister has said time and time again that it is a priority list, he admitted in estimates that it is not.

What my motion for a return is asking for, so people who are actually working on these projects can gain some clarity into the government's plans, is for the government to provide the list of Alberta Transportation construction projects by priority, not by highway number. We are not asking for any new information here. We are just asking the government to reorder the projects that are done in this document and to list the projects by priority and not by highway number. Mr. Speaker, this should not be hard to do because, in fact, we know the government does have a priority list. They are just choosing to keep it secret. We know this because we FOIPed it and found out that there is a list.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has moved Motion for a Return 7.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:53 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson	Blakeman	Rowe
Anglin	Eggen	Stier
Barnes	Forsyth	Strankman
Bikman	Pedersen	Wilson

Against the motion:

Allen	Horner	Olesen
Bhardwaj	Jansen	Olson
Bhullar	Jeneroux	Quadri
Calahasen	Johnson, J.	Quest
Cao	Johnson, L.	Rodney
Casey	Khan	Sandhu
Dallas	Klimchuk	Sarich
Denis	Kubinec	Scott
Dorward	Lemke	Starke
Drysdale	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Fenske	McIver	Weadick
Fraser	McQueen	Webber
Goudreau	Oberle	Xiao
Hancock		

Totals: For – 12 Against – 40

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Film Industry Support

510. Mr. Pedersen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate a competitive tax credit regime for supporting the film industry in Alberta rather than the current grant system.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is great to be here today to introduce Motion 510 to the Assembly, a motion that urges the government to reinstate a competitive film tax credit system for supporting Alberta's film industry. As we are all aware, a system of grants is inherently flawed due to its basic nature, that of picking winners and losers. Any attempt to attract and maintain the film industry as part of Alberta's economy is laudable, but completely changing that process over the years has created instability and skepticism within the industry.

That is why I am proud to be here today to champion a return to a competitive film tax credit, a system that was successful, a system that works and is working in North America. There will be those that want government to get out of the way altogether, but I don't think that is the solution. There is a role for government, but we need to adapt with the industry, not against it.

A competitive film tax credit has many benefits for Albertans in and out of the film industry. Among the best reasons for a film tax credit, as I have mentioned, is that it does not pick winners or losers. It does not discriminate against one group over another or one company over another, and it does not make political decisions for the group with the best lobbyist.

A competitive film tax credit ensures that there is equality and freedom in the film industry, something that is lacking now across the spectrum, from the entry level and right on up to the major Hollywood productions. I know that we still have funding through the Alberta multimedia development fund, as I am sure other members will point out, but it is far from being a fair and equal system. While some stakeholders approve of the granting system,

it still requires applications, reviews, and then waiting to see if your project is funded or approved for some or all of the funds.

Sometimes we forget to look outside of our borders to see what is being done elsewhere, and this is truly and sadly the case with film tax credits. We need to look no further than British Columbia, where the provincial NDP is promising to raise the film tax credit to 40 per cent should they win the election. That's going to do a lot of good when it comes to attracting and building a competitive film industry there because they have invested the time and the effort to diversify their economy and attract film production to B.C. This modest increase will make them even more competitive while making Alberta even less competitive simply because we refuse to look at what is working elsewhere.

We can also look to Saskatchewan for a lesson in what not to do as they recently eliminated their film tax credit. You may very well ask what happened once they made that decision, and the answer is that industry packed their bags almost instantly, and they're gone. It's similar to what happened here when we eliminated our tax credit. It's happening now in Saskatchewan, and other provinces are becoming even more competitive. What this is going to end up meaning is that there will be provinces that will forever be ahead of the game, and all the while Alberta becomes less and less competitive and attractive to the film industry and all of its support groups.

We know there have been some remarkable films produced at least in part in Alberta, whether it's *Brokeback Mountain*, *Unforgiven*, *Inception*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, or *Passchendaele*. However, we are losing ground against other provinces when it comes to our competitiveness, not only because we eliminated our competitive film tax credit but also because we are failing to respond to the changing times in film. Now, this is not only about getting Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie to come to visit Alberta once every couple of years. This is about ensuring that we can attract film projects of varying scales, whether it's an independent film or it's Warner Brothers.

Through a film tax credit everyone benefits regardless of who your friends are and regardless of what your budget may be. In the end, don't we all want a sustainable and world-class talent pool that chooses to live and work in Alberta? It's not too late to restore a vibrant and successful industry to Alberta. I know there will likely be other members that will disagree with me on this, but I think that we need to fix a system that was changed by this government in the first place. We need to restore equality and fairness in our film industry, and we need to stop giving millions of dollars to the chosen few while leaving everybody else in the dark.

5:10

I would also be remiss if I did not talk about the spinoff effects of having a vibrant, diverse, and thriving cultural industry. We have been hearing a lot of talk about economic diversification for the last couple of decades, but all too often what we have seen are grants to multibillion-dollar corporations or subsidies given to friends or connected individuals. This has done very little to diversify the economy, and in some ways it actually hinders diversification because it shows people outside of Alberta that we aren't competitive or a fair place to conduct business, that we just give money without a long-term vision in place. Why would they come here when the government just gives a cheque to their competitor and when the government maintains an uneven playing field?

The same applies to the film industry, and we see the results of that every day. We know that when people come here to work or when they move here for work, they need to live within the

community where they stay. They need to eat, they need to sleep, they need to buy gas, and they need to go out every now and then. Fortunately, that means that they are going to be spending money in local stores, staying at local hotels, or maybe buying a house, eating at a local restaurant and leaving a tip for an Albertan that works in the hospitality industry. All of these are good things, which is why we need to attract a film industry back to Alberta. We may not be Hollywood – and we don't need to pretend to be – but we can still be successful, and we can exemplify the Canadian culture, spirit, and work ethic we are known for around the world.

Another piece of the puzzle is the opportunity to consistently attract and deliver various sectors within the film industry so that we can develop and retain individuals in the spinoff industries such as postproduction. As we all like to talk about, producing a value-added product can be very beneficial to the long-term success of the industry and its many products. This is an opportunity to actually do something, to walk the walk and make sure that we are securing and maximizing on all parts of the process.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour and a privilege to be here to debate Motion 510, and I look forward to the discussion that we are going to have in the next little bit, but I want to close with this. We were all elected to ensure fairness and equality in everything we do, and I believe that this is an opportunity to do so. This is an opportunity to show the film industry and the world that we can be competitive and that they should come here to do business. We can show them that when they come here, regardless of the size of their project or what they are here for, they will be treated fairly and that they will receive the same treatment as everyone else.

We can diversify our economy. We can see the benefits of attracting business, people, and investments to our province, and we can restore the competitiveness of our film industry. I think those are all laudable goals, and I know they are all achievable. I believe that reinstating the film tax credit is but one way we can further diversify our economy, and I look forward to seeing stakeholders involved in developing even more tools to help their industry become even more competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the debate we are about to have, and I hope my colleagues will support Motion 510. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Minister of Culture.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to stand today to speak on the motion from the hon. Member for Medicine Hat to create a competitive tax credit regime for supporting the film industry in Alberta. As the minister responsible for the film, television, and digital media industry in Alberta I recognize the importance of providing support to the talented Albertans who are our province's screen-based production sector, and I'm also proud to report that Alberta is a leader in this industry, with a competitive production incentive program nationally and regionally.

Our film, television, and digital media industry is an important part of Alberta's economy and a contributor to our cultural fabric. This vibrant industry employs over 3,000 Albertans. It is responsible for more than \$400 million in economic activity over the last five years. We know that every dollar government invests in film, television, and digital media results in spinoff benefits for many other Alberta industries. Alberta's successes in film, television, and digital media also help to diversify our economy and to retain and attract talent and skilled labour.

This industry helps us tell more Alberta stories so we can showcase our province to the world. It is in our best interest that this industry not only remain competitive nationally and internationally but that it continue to grow. That's why the government of Alberta through Alberta Culture offers incentives to producers in this sector through the Alberta multimedia development fund.

The film, television, and digital media production industry is very competitive. Alberta contends not only with traditional production centres like Ontario but also with American states with comparable locations like New Mexico and Louisiana. Different production incentives are offered across Canada and North America to encourage local production.

Alberta's multimedia development fund, created in 1998, provides production incentives against all eligible production costs in a grant form as well as funding for Alberta production companies for project and script development, training and mentorship, export development, and market development. Now, through this fund production companies can receive up to 30 per cent of Alberta production costs back. So the comment about picking winners and losers is totally out of line because it's based on the Alberta span. We want the money to stay in Alberta.

Some competing jurisdictions in Canada and the United States provide tax credits as opposed to production grants for film, television, and digital media projects. These tax credit incentives are typically a refundable corporate income tax based on eligible expenditures or labour costs. By comparison our Alberta grant system provides up to a 30 per cent return on Alberta production costs, which is equivalent to a labour-based tax credit of up to 55 per cent. Alberta has always provided funding through a grant-based system. Our grant system has several advantages. It offers quicker payout times and a tax credit, a point producers very much like. Paperwork and administration requirements are very straightforward. Our system is very flexible and proactive, allowing us to adjust to changing needs in the production sector.

Regarding the future this discussion comes down to two points. First, regardless of what form a production incentive takes, we know it is needed for more jurisdictions to remain competitive and to attract production in support of their local industry. Second, while our current grant system is working well, we will continue to keep watch on trends in this sector so we can adjust our system accordingly.

Alberta Culture will continue to provide services that support the growth, sustainability, and business attraction of the film, television, and digital media industry, always being fiscally responsible. We will continue to work with industry and stakeholders through the Alberta Film Advisory Council to make sure that appropriate revisions are made to the incentive program when needed to maintain its effectiveness and to maximize its benefit to the industry.

As tax credits fall under the responsibility of the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, Alberta Culture officials will continue to work with colleagues in that department to assess the effectiveness of support of this sector and its appropriateness with the province's overall tax policy approach. This government will remain an active partner alongside industry to make sure that our screen-based production sector is growing and is sustainable for our province.

Now, a bit of perspective here. The film *Freezer* was filmed entirely at the Film Alberta Studio in January with Dylan McDermott, and postproduction is now being completed here in Alberta. This is a first as this work usually goes south. *Blackstone* just wrapped up. This summer alone we have *Klondike*, six one-

hour shows being filmed; *Hell on Wheels*, 10 one-hour shows; and *Heartland*. We know that people love our crews. We are trying to get people to come back to Alberta. We know they want to come back, and that's really important to me.

This industry is a reflection of our culture, and it contributed to our economy and quality of life. Job creation and diversification are the ultimate goals. For example, there was a student at NAIT who got to be a part of the film *Freezer*. He did some work on it, and he has his credit on his very, very first film. If that doesn't inspire a student at school, I don't know what does.

So before any change in how Alberta provides financial support to this sector can be made, this must be fully explored to determine what is best for the province and what is best for the industry overall. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

5:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to speak on this motion, and I'd like to thank the member for bringing it forward. We had to have some deliberation on this motion to reinstate the tax credit regime rather than the current grant system, and upon careful reflection we have chosen to support the motion.

It certainly is a complex issue, but considering the competitive industry – you know, many large film companies devote entire departments to looking at cross-jurisdictional analysis of film incentive programs to find where they might go. We don't have to look anywhere further in Canada than British Columbia and then Ontario to see how they nurtured over time, using tax incentives, some of North America's and, indeed, the world's very best film industries.

You know, it's important to have stability over time just like in any industry – right? – and to know that that regime is not going to change. What happened when we did take away the tax incentives here in the province of Alberta years ago was that we saw an exodus of film production companies and the spinoff industries and individuals who serviced those industries. Really, we haven't got them back, quite frankly.

Because movies can be shot anywhere in the world and because of the large dollars that are involved and the large returns that can come from a successful film industry, you know, we really missed the opportunity here by making a change. Certainly, I think it's the right idea to try to get that back and to make that commitment to a long-term set of tax incentives that are competitive with other jurisdictions around the world so that we can nurture the film industry that I think Alberta deserves both now and in the future. We know that, for example, when we shoot films in Alberta, the economic multiplier really exceeds almost any other industry that I can think of. You know, we see at least 10 or 11 times the original investment from a given film, a major production.

You know, I think that the damage is clear. We know that in 1996 the changes, like I said, from the Klein regime have caused the industry damage that we have never really recovered from.

A consistent message is certainly important. You know, the grant system can leave people out in the cold and can be quite arbitrary. I mean, picking winners and losers: maybe that's not the best way of putting it. Rather, it's a question of allowing the industry to build organically rather than just making arbitrary decisions about which projects might get grants or not.

In 2008-2009 the Minister of Culture at that point was publicly saying that we should introduce a revamped incentive system – very interesting – that could include a combination of tax credits, capital grants, and development grants. So we've heard those noises from over in the government side, and we shouldn't preclude the possibility of moving back to that sort of thing. That's why a motion, I think, is a good first step.

The current Minister of Culture said in 2012 that a discussion was ongoing about tax credits, but we haven't heard much about that since. Again, a very friendly reminder, very organic here, with the idea of the best interests of the industry and of the Alberta public: I think it's time to start that discussion again.

Alberta is the only province that provides grants as opposed to tax credits. I think we all know that. People who work in the creative sector say that without a tax credit system and a dedicated system for developing productions and talents, Alberta will never be as competitive as other provinces. You know, we've done research, talking to people in the industry in Edmonton and Calgary. They do say that there is some quick turnaround with grants, right? Maybe we shouldn't preclude the possibility of having some of those available, too, but the bedrock investment, the thing that will actually make the industry go over the long term, will be tax incentives, certainly.

You know, there are big-budget films. We just haven't really attracted that many. They pull out a few chestnuts and repeat them over and over because really there are just so few examples to choose from compared to a place like Ontario or British Columbia. Big-budget films are choosing to shoot in those places. For example, a \$50 million film would receive almost twice as much funding in the province of Ontario as it would in Alberta, where the funding is capped through the grant system currently. In Alberta we need to come up with a system that works well for both small productions and large productions. Again, I think a tax incentive system would meet that need.

Alberta should have a tax incentive system, Mr. Speaker, that allows us to compete. I also would venture to say that we need to do more as well. I think that we need to invest in the film infrastructure that can support film production as well, to take it one step further. We have a critical lack, for example, of studio space across the province. If we had that infrastructure in place, made that investment, helped with that, every film production company, you know, would be helped, right? In 2013, this year, members of the film industry even began a public letter writing campaign asking for these issues to be addressed, and we haven't seen anything come of that so far. Building a creative hub both here in Edmonton and in Calgary I think is something that's long overdue. You can talk about it, but if you don't invest in it, it'll never happen.

Really, I see that the capital infrastructure spending that has taken place with this current government, with this Premier has actually been reduced significantly. We see it being reduced by at least \$14.4 million, Mr. Speaker. You can talk all you want about culture, but if you don't put the money in there, it's not going to be there, right? It's just talk.

I think it's ludicrous to talk about gutting capital spending when there's already such a serious shortage of film infrastructure. If you move to a certain point, it's like the roads breaking down, right? If you don't do the maintenance at a certain point, you have critical failure, and that's what we're close to at this point with the film infrastructure in this province.

The New Democrats do support the motion to build and to nurture our film industry in the province of Alberta. We also see a broader issue about the undermining of our culture support in this province for a long time. We need to repair that damage, Mr.

Speaker, by investing in infrastructure and developing a more robust incentive program.

With that, I thank the member for bringing forward this motion. I certainly will vote in support of it, and I encourage others to do so, too.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I need a bit more information before I know whether I'm going to support what's being put forward. [A cellphone rang] Donuts for everyone. Whose phone is ringing?

An Hon. Member: Fifty bucks for the food bank.

Ms Blakeman: Or 50 bucks for the food bank. Oh. Miraculously, it stopped ringing. Okay. There we go.

This government – this government – under whichever Premier you want has really had not a love-hate relationship with film and television development and production in Alberta but more like a passive aggressive sort of relationship with them. At various times people, ministers, have been willing to stand up and say: “Yes, indeed, we understand how much money this brings into our province. It gives us great exposure. It actually has a quantifiable spinoff now on tourism because people come because they want to see where the film was shot, and/or they are just impressed by the scenery and want to come there themselves.” But we've also just had devastating cuts to the community.

I mean, at one point we were poised to overtake B.C. as the big film production centre in Canada. That was right when Premier Klein came in, and everything was slashed. They dumped AMPDC, which was the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation. They slashed the funding from wherever it had gotten to at that point, like, \$30 million down to \$3 million. I mean, everything just died. We had actually gotten to a point, as I said, where we were poised to beat out B.C. – and there's a lot of activity in B.C. – because we had things like the costume trailers, which are custom built. They're built to do a certain job. It's very particular, and it's very expensive. We had those. We had the lighting trucks. We had makeup and dressing room trucks. We had a lot of people who had invested a lot of money in film production in the province, and they just got into the truck and drove away and took their equipment with them because they had to work. They had bills owing on this stuff – it was not cheap – and they left.

5:30

Well, I remember the community working so hard to get the previous Treasurer, I guess it was, Stockwell Day, to go out and go to a film shoot and see, you know, what was going on there. There was always this great suspicion that somehow we were hatching anarchists or something in the editing suite, a very strange attitude of the government. Eventually the community did manage to convince the government that they were a good investment, and we moved to the three-stream system that has just now been adjusted.

I keep in touch with this community. I used to work in it as an actor. I do keep in touch with the actors' union, the Directors Guild, the Teamsters, IATSE, which is the stage and technical workers. There is a big community still in Alberta although they're very frustrated because so many of them still live here and pay mortgages here but are working somewhere else. I remember a really good conversation before the last election where a number of people got up and said: yeah, you know, my kid works in this

industry, and I'd like them to work more at home and less out of the province.

There was an intense lobbying effort to get the government to adjust the three-stream system, and they have. Of the current three streams, stream 1 is indigenous/coproduction, which is funding up to 30 per cent of all the eligible Alberta costs, but it does require between 30 and 100 per cent Alberta ownership of the production. So you get a better deal. You get more if it's an Alberta production or has a lot of Albertans involved.

There is also stream 2. What they did was that they took the three streams and collapsed them because there was a way to kind of work the system that was happening with the three streams. They've collapsed them into two streams, and it seems to be working much better except for a whole bunch of other things. The second stream is the foreign/service ones. That's where you get the Hollywood ones coming in. They can get up to 26 per cent.

Now, let me give you the list of what they actually cover. The eligible expenses include postproduction – and I think that Alberta might be one of the few jurisdictions that actually covers postproduction costs – special effects; all rentals that they do, from fridges and trucks to costumes and all rentals; set construction and props; animation; craft services, which for you that don't know is food, feeding people; all of the Alberta labour that's involved in the production; food and accommodations; in-province travel; all production services; and additional to that. So it's covering a very wide range.

Now, when you go to tax incentives, quite often the tax incentives are based on labour. I'm not sure exactly what the sponsoring member was looking for, and I'd be looking for a bit of clarification. Neither system is terrific. There are drawbacks with the tax system. You know, what are you going to cover?

Two, in talking to people, actually, just recently at the Mayor's Celebration of the Arts and a couple of other arts events I've been at in the last week, the producers will admit that they get their money faster under this system than they would under a tax incentive system. Well, when your name is on the line and your house is put up as collateral, that means something. The percentage that you're getting back is also very good. I mean, are you talking about a tax incentive that's 5 per cent? Are you talking about one that's 50 per cent? What are you going to cover? So it's a bit more complicated. You haven't fleshed out for me what it is exactly that you're looking for.

An Hon. Member: Fifty-thousand feet.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Fifty-thousand feet? Yeah. I'm sorry. At 50,000 feet or taking it back to the principle of the thing: that doesn't cut it for me.

We fooled around a lot with this industry. It produces between \$8 and \$11 for every dollar that is invested in it by government, so it is an astonishing payback. I mean, honestly, if any of us could get that rate at the bank right now, we would be cashing out everything we had and running down to the bank to get 8 to 11 per cent back on every dollar that we put on. Holy mackerel.

We have a well-trained group of people in this province that know how to do it. We've got experienced producers, and the system that is in place currently has a couple of things in it that people wanted me to mention specifically, and that was that there is a commitment to mentor and bring along more Alberta labour and talent. They wouldn't want to see that lost under a different system. They were very specific that they didn't want to lose that mentorship piece.

I mean, this system isn't great. Part of it is the cap. There's a \$5 million cap per production, I think, and in this day and age that's pretty small potatoes for the film community. You know, at this point a \$5 million film is almost animation. It's very short. It's going to be, like, under 20 minutes. If you're talking about professional feature length, it's very hard to get anything done, whether the full amount of the film is \$5 million or if your eligible grant is \$5 million. I really hate the cap. When we're getting that kind of money back, why is there a cap on each production? That needs to go.

The second thing is that the fund itself for the same reasons needs to be much higher. I can't even remember how much is in there right now. Minister, is it \$30 million? Nineteen million? How much is in the film fund right now?

Mrs. Klimchuk: It's \$19 million.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, of course, through the Speaker.

It's \$19 million, says the minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in favour of this motion, and I do so because I actually have a little bit of experience with the . . . [interjections] I couldn't hesitate to stand up and say that. If the hon. members will pull up the movie *Double Jeopardy* with Ashley Judd, you will notice that some of that filming was done in Howe Sound, right north of Vancouver. The reason that was done there is because of the tax credits that B.C. had in place. That's the reality. That was a film that was designed to represent Washington state, and the B.C. Film Commission, with the way they had their film credit system, was able to get a part of that film up into B.C. By the way, my wife's church in Edgemont Village was also in that chase scene in the middle of the village.

The point I want to make is simply this. To keep the film industry competitive, you have to realize what the competition is doing. When you look at the amount of economic activity the film industry brings, that is why these other jurisdictions do give tax credits to entice these movies to come film. Nothing is more, I think, depressing than to see a movie being filmed in Vancouver that's representing Calgary or Edmonton in its scenery, just for that very reason.

There's a potential here to attract, but the real potential is to make us competitive, and that's why I stand right now in support of this motion, for the singular purpose of making and keeping the Alberta film industry competitive. There's a lot of value that we're missing by not being competitive. If we were to have this type of tax structure, that would encourage and invite the industry to come here, to keep us competitive, particularly when we measure ourselves against these other jurisdictions like British Columbia, like Ontario. It actually increases our economic activity in the film industry, and that's something that should never be taken lightly.

5:40

When you do look at the film *Double Jeopardy* and you see the car go off the ferry into the water, I was in a boat just six metres out of the film as a member of the Canadian Coast Guard, looking to save anybody that was going to drown. Just for your own

knowledge, the people in the car were actually filmed in a pool, so I didn't get to save anybody that day.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion 510, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat. The intent of this motion, from my understanding, is to reinstate a film tax credit regime similar to those found in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. My understanding is that this would replace the current grant system known as the Alberta multimedia development fund. The tax credit system proposed by this motion would reimburse production companies for filming in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the film industry is a substantial economic contributor to Alberta's prosperity. This is why any motion that claims to be aimed at protecting and bolstering that industry is worthy of serious and careful consideration in the House. It is also why I rise today to speak in favour of the hon. member's motion.

The film industry is a competitive one. There is no doubt about that. While it is often pointed out that Alberta's natural beauty makes it an obvious and attractive option as a filming location, any production company's bottom line is inevitably going to play a role in deciding where to film a project. Thus, we need to take a close look at Alberta's current grant-based system and whether or not it does enough to encourage film production in this province.

I had the luxury of introducing my father in the House recently as he was a former console operator, sitting above the clock. However, Mr. Speaker, he did that job as a way to supplement his income while he pursued and was successful in his own passion for film production. After studying film at Brock University in Ontario, he moved here to Alberta to begin his own film production company. It wasn't a difficult choice at the time as the industry was growing, and the potential seemed endless. However, times changed in the 1990s, and we are now able to realize the significance of the film and motion picture industry in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be fruitful in this conversation to examine the success stories stemming from the film tax credits. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the two biggest and most prolific filming sectors in Canada, Ontario and Quebec, are two sectors that have implemented film tax credits. Though it trails behind Quebec for third place in film production, British Columbia also makes use of a film tax credit.

After doing some of my own research, the Ontario Media Development Corporation offers the Ontario production services tax credit, OPSTC. This is a refundable tax credit based upon eligible Ontario labour and other production expenditures incurred by a qualifying corporation with respect to an eligible film or TV production. OPSTC requirements are generally harmonized with the federal film or video production services tax credit. The latter is administered by the Canadian audiovisual certification office, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and Canada Revenue Agency.

The OPSTC has been expanded. For expenditures incurred after June 30, 2009, it is calculated at 25 per cent of all qualifying production expenditures in Ontario. Something big to note, though: there is no limit on the amount of qualifying production expenditures. In addition, this credit can be combined with the federal film or video production services tax credit for 16 per cent of qualified Canadian labour expenditures. Again, something

substantial is that there is no per-project or annual corporate tax credit limits.

In order to ensure an economic return for the province, the OPSTC requires that eligible productions must exceed a production cost of \$1 million. That typically means more money flowing back into the province in the form of jobs for local crews and talent, not to mention publicity for filming locations that pays off in the longer run.

Similar to Ontario, Quebec offers the Quebec tax credit for film production services. In order to qualify for this credit, productions must be of the eligible genre, and production costs must exceed \$1 million. The matter is slightly different for the production of a series. For a series production with a running time of 30 minutes or less, production costs must exceed \$100,000 per episode. Episodes with longer running times must exceed \$200,000 per episode. I recently had the opportunity to tour the *Blackstone* television set being filmed right here in Edmonton by Prairie Dog films, and in talking to some of the industry representatives, the limitations we currently have restrict additional growth for these series. I believe the evidence shows that a film tax credit is potent incentive for production companies when choosing among locations.

Mr. Speaker, there is no reason to suspect that a tax credit will have the opposite effect here in Alberta to what it has had on the other film industries of Ontario and Quebec. We have some really talented individuals here in the province, and many of them have the dream to do business here in the province that involves the production of film projects. Any helping hand we may give them by attracting future employment prospects ought to be considered.

I spoke with one such individual last week. She went off to study her trade in British Columbia, but she has recently returned to Alberta, to Edmonton. Could she have more opportunity in British Columbia? She thought so, but she also has a passion for our province. Mr. Speaker, these are the people I want to stand for in this House and represent.

When leveraged along with Alberta's natural scenic appeal, I see no reason why a film tax credit could not take us closer to making Alberta a mecca for filmmaking in Canada. I'm not saying that this motion will singlehandedly change the industry, but I do think it's a big step in the right direction to have this conversation. This is why I will be voting in favour of the motion, Mr. Speaker. I wholeheartedly commend the hon. Member for Medicine Hat for bringing this to the floor of the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to lend my support to the motion put forward today by my colleague from Medicine Hat, Motion 510. "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to reinstate a competitive tax credit regime for supporting the film industry in Alberta rather than the current grant system." It has been just over one year since the Member for Medicine Hat and I were elected in neighbouring constituencies to serve in this Assembly. One of the things we both campaigned on was to re-establish a film tax credit in Alberta to compete with other North American jurisdictions and restore Alberta's film industry.

The decision by this government to move away from a tax credit system and instead implement the Alberta multimedia development fund grants has not increased the competitiveness of Alberta's film industry. With the AMDF grants the government is now in the position of hand-picking winners and losers in the film

industry. This motion is asking for a reinstatement of a competitive tax credit system for film industry labour costs. This type of tax credit would apply across the board and throughout the province as opposed to what is in place today.

Now, Alberta already has an advantage over some jurisdictions because of our low tax regime, including the fact that we do not have a provincial sales tax, although, unfortunately, the Premier's principal secretary would like to see our taxes hiked. Adding a tax credit would provide yet another incentive for film studios and production facilities to set up shop in Alberta and employ Albertans. It would put us on a competitive footing with B.C. and Ontario, both of which have a film tax credit for labour costs. As the hon. Member for Medicine Hat has said, in B.C. it's a big part of the election platform to actually increase the tax credit for the industry should the NDP win. The federal government also provides this type of tax credit. In fact, nearly all provinces with the exception of our province and Saskatchewan provide some type of film tax credit for labour or other expenses.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I ask all members of this Assembly to think about restoring a competitive film tax credit that would help the film industry in our province and to support Motion 510.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, you caught my eye.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just rise as I noticed that we began debate about three minutes late. In order that we can get a vote today, I would like to ask for unanimous consent of the House to waive 3(1) and to continue past 6 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the Deputy Government House Leader, this requires unanimous consent, hon. members. So I'll ask one question. Is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, I was wondering at this point whether we could have unanimous consent for one-minute bells.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. The motion by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is for one-minute bells in the event of a division. I'll ask the question. Is anyone opposed?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Then if there's a bell, it'll be 10 minutes.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this. I was very interested when this motion came up. Certainly, it's because I have what I consider to be a significant amount of experience in this area. I was a film student back in the '80s along with my television career, so I went to school with a lot of film students, kept in touch with them over the years, followed their careers, and was lucky enough last year to be appointed as co-chair of the Alberta Film Advisory Council. So I've spent the last year really immersed in this issue.

5:50

It's interesting. When we began to talk about just how workable the Alberta multimedia development fund is, I got a lot of feedback from people in the industry. In fact, for the last year I've got nothing but feedback from people in the industry. I feel there's a little bit of a disconnect from the information I'm hearing across the aisle and what I've experienced in terms of messaging.

What I'm hearing from hundreds of people that I've spoken with is that the AMDF creates a lot of TV and film production activity in Alberta. It keeps us competitive in the marketplace. Alberta's current system is easy to work with, and as all of those people told me, it is utterly fair. The rules are consistently applied. There's no jury, no bureaucracy picking shows they like and shows they don't like. It's strictly first-come, first-served as long as you produce shows that qualify under the guidelines.

Now, AMPA, which represents the local film and television industry, is one hundred per cent behind the cultural grant system tied to production spending within the province because they say it's working. It's extremely convenient for everyone concerned. It's well understood by the coproduction partners from other parts of Canada and the U.S. and other parts of the world.

A tax credit system, on the other hand, is far more complicated. It's cumbersome, it's not as fair, it's not as efficient, and it's not desired by any of the people I spoke to in the industry. For example, the federal government funding mechanism, CAVCO, is a tax credit system. It's more labour intensive for both the governing body and the applicant than a simple grant. Tax credits require more complicated audits because the money trail is longer. All of this creates more bureaucracy instead of supporting art and artists.

Bureaucracy slows everything down. It makes productions more expensive. Producers have to work on loans or on deficit while waiting for that tax credit assessment to come through. Why make producers jump through more hoops, more paperwork, more expense when they should concentrate on doing good work? Money should funnel down to where it's needed and not back up the system like bad plumbing.

The current Alberta program is revenue positive. Grants are tied directly to spending within Alberta. More money comes back into the province in forms of tax revenue, increased economic activity than is invested in grants. So it fits into a strategy of economic diversification, and that fosters important areas like knowledge-based businesses, digital communications, web-based enterprises, even tourism.

Something else to remember is that this is a cultural program. It's not just job creation. It helps Alberta companies compete in the world marketplace, provides opportunities for creative Albertans to tell their stories to the world. Producers, writers, directors, actors, editors, cameramen, sound engineers, animators, musicians: all of those people are working in this province using this fund successfully. One company I spoke with has created hundreds of hours of programming using this fund, all of it across Canada, syndicated in more than 35 countries. They've now managed to build their own studio with two sound stages, nine edit suites, two sound production suites, and computer animation. This is a fund that's working.

Now, an economist at Simon Fraser University recently wrote that B.C. subsidies amount to a taxpayer cost of \$125,000 per film. It kind of sounds like corporate welfare. I don't think you mean to suggest that that's a road we should go down, but it sort of sounds like it is. Do we need to look at other provinces as examples? Well, why don't we look at other provinces as examples? In Budget 2012 Saskatchewan announced that the province was winding down its tax credit. Why? Because this is the problem with tax credits. Industry experts indicate that a greater level of subsidization was required to remain competitive. You raise yours half a point, another company gives you a little bit more, then off you go to another part of the country. It's a race to the bottom. This is one of the problems with it. Provinces are now realizing what former Premier Klein had the foresight to point out

years ago, that tax credits for film activities eventually become unsustainable.

Now, I talked to a couple of producers who came back from B.C. in the last year because, lo and behold, they have work here. They have work here, and they're happy about it. One of the things they talk about is this happy example of the fact that they're developing programs that are going into production. A tax credit does not support that kind of initiative. Development is what creates the critical mass of infrastructure here in Alberta. Tax credits work for companies who use Alberta as a location but migrate to wherever it's cheaper to produce the next time because the next province will have a bigger tax credit. That's the problem.

We have a program here that's working. When I talk to people in the industry, they love it. They love it. It works for them. We shouldn't fix what isn't broken.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

If there are no other speakers, I'll recognize the Member for Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was great to hear the debate on Motion 510 today, a motion that urges the government

to reinstate a competitive film tax credit system for supporting the Alberta film industry. There have been some great discussions, and I'm proud to be here today to champion a return to a competitive film tax credit. A competitive film tax credit has many benefits for Albertans in and out of the film industry. Among the best reasons for a film tax credit, as I mentioned, is that it does not pick winners and losers. It does not discriminate against one group over another, and it does not make political decisions.

I would urge all of my colleagues to support Motion 510 and walk the walk when it comes to making a decision that can improve our province and make us more competitive and to do the right thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The question has been called.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 carried]

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as it's close to 6 p.m., I would move that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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