



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 13, 2013

Issue 57

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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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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Calahasen	Sandhu
Casey	Stier
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 13, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, let us pray. Let us pray for those who hunger not but for food alone but also for purity, sanctity, and the pursuit of justice for all. Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem, led by M. Paul Lorieau. Please join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you very much.
Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have several school groups here today. Let's begin with the Minister of Human Services, followed by the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the Minister of Health, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 15 students from Duggan elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They're seated in the public gallery. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Ms Roxanne Hamly, and educational assistant Laurie Grabia. I would ask that the students, their teacher, and the educational assistant please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, followed by Stony Plain.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very happy to rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 21 bright young minds from Brightview elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. This past Friday I visited their classroom, and their questions were absolutely fantastic. They're here today with their teachers, Mr. Tyson Mastel and Mrs. Joanne Landmark. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to stand and recognize a group of students from Muir Lake school in my constituency of Stony Plain. They're here all week participating in the School at the Legislature program. They're accompanied by their teacher, Debbie Wayken, educational assistant Denise Gibbons, and one of the parents, Fiona Majeau.

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

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Let us move on, then, to other guests. The hon. Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the first half of the visiting members of the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary. With us today from the council are those from the Vietnamese, Chinese, Ethiopian, Jamaican, Sudanese, Filipino, East Indian, and Somali-Canadian communities. I believe the first half of the group is seated in the public gallery. I would like to ask members of the Assembly to join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Culture.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly nine volunteers and students from Project Adult Literacy Society, otherwise known as PALS. Low literacy rates are a significant problem facing Alberta. Did you know that 1 in 3 adults do not have literacy skills and 1 in 2 have low-level math skills? PALS is a community-based literacy program that addresses the learning needs of adults with low-level literacy and math skills. Their mission is changing lives through literacy, and I commend them for their work. I would ask them to please rise as I read their names: Trish Derkach, Marilyn Shannon, Shirley Sandul, Monica Das, Adam Rupp, Quentin Broadwood, Dorothy Lane, Luiting Hudson, and Ali Elhag. I ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly some professionals from Alberta's film industry. We have here today industry experts who are representatives from the Alberta Media Production Industries Association. I'd ask that they rise as I call their names: the board of directors president, Joe Novak; the vice-president north, Connie Edwards; director Tom Cox; and last but not least, the executive director for AMPIA, Bill Evans. I'd like to thank you for coming today and for all the excellent work you do with Alberta Culture and AMPIA. I would ask that my colleagues provide you with the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four pharmacists who have come to Edmonton today to urge the government to halt the changes in pharmacy without proper consideration and due diligence. They are armed with a petition with over 25,000 signatures – this is just part of it – that we'll be introducing later today and throughout the week. The pharmacists are Al Hodgins, Rita Lyster, Kit Poon, and Jody Shkrobot, who is also the former head of the Canadian Pharmacists Association. I'd

ask that these hard-working pharmacists please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Calgary-Foothills.

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 Mr. Ibrahim Cin, Junaid Zumrutpynar, and Malik Muradov, who are here today to help us recognize and celebrate Turkish culture. They are seated in your gallery. Along with them I'd also like to introduce 43 members who are seated in the public gallery and 12 that are seated in the members' gallery, who are all here to celebrate Turkish culture. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests from Neerlandia, Alberta, which is near Barrhead. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand: Mr. Wes Werkman and his wife, Gloria Werkman, and their beautiful five-year-old daughter, Saige Werkman. Saige Werkman at the age of six months had a heart transplant at the U of A Stollery hospital here in Edmonton. She is now five years old. She is a beautiful young lady, and she is ready to take on the world. I had a lovely meeting with them today. They are in strong support of my bill, Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, which will come up for second reading tomorrow. I thank the three of you for coming out. Please give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of very hard-working elected individuals. The municipal district of Lesser Slave River reeve and council members are here and were very instrumental in the fire recovery process in their area. I'm sure they didn't get elected thinking that they'd have to deal with the devastation of the century, but they did and in a collaborative and positive way. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise as I call their names: Reeve Denny Garratt, Darcie Acton, Jeff Commins, Murray Kerik, Darren Fulmore, Brian Rosche, and Robert Esau. I'd ask this Assembly to give them a warm, warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, let's proceed elsewhere.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank-you Letter from MD of Lesser Slave River

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May 2011 the town of Slave Lake and the Sawridge First Nation and communities within the municipal district of Lesser Slave River were subjected to major wildfires. In this time of crisis and need this government stepped up and provided much-needed support for the people and communities of Lesser Slave River.

I've been asked by the municipal district of Lesser Slave River to read their letter thanking the Premier and the government of Alberta for all they did during these difficult times.

Dear Premier and Government of Alberta,

On behalf of the Council, staff and residents of the MD of Lesser Slave River, I would like to personally extend our sincere thanks to those that helped us the most in our time of need, the Alberta Government.

In our battle against the natural disaster that shook our community – the 2011 wildfires – the Alberta Government was a tower of strength. When the extent of our fires became apparent, our residents' safety was quickly placed above all else and resources committed to assist with rescue and disaster relief missions. This wasn't politics, this was real leadership.

I have to say, and this is something every elected official and every resident of Alberta should know: if you're in trouble and you don't have any idea how to start solving it, you couldn't live in a better province. We could not have fought the fires, brought our people back, developed interim accommodation and begun to rebuild our communities without the huge contribution made by the Alberta government. We were provided with people, materials, logistical support, and of course, funding. I don't think any other province or state in North America could have done it as well, and as quickly. I can't begin to express how grateful we are.

And even today, the Alberta Government continues to be a tremendous support. The funding that was given to help with ongoing infrastructure and social recovery is what has carried us through. It allowed us to develop a strong partnership with the Town of Slave Lake and Sawridge First Nation and helped us get our region back on our feet and to make it better than before.

To that end, I'm pleased to say that we are now moving forward. In what will be the two-year anniversary of the event, I believe our region has recovered. We are now safer, stronger and more resilient, and this is a result of your support.

Again, thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity, and for the significant role you played in helping our community heal.

Sincerely,

Denny Garratt, reeve of the MD of Lesser Slave River, and council members

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Generic Drug Pricing

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problems around generic drug pricing just aren't going away, and now everyday Albertans are getting fed up.

Earlier today we introduced Jody Shkrobot to the media. He's also seated here in the gallery this afternoon. Jody is a pharmacist from here in Edmonton and also served a term as president of the Canadian Pharmacists Association in 2011-2012. He is here to present a petition to the Legislature with 25,000 signatures on it urging the government to ditch its across-the-board plan to force pharmacists to sell generic drugs at 18 per cent of brand name prices.

For months Wildrose has joined advocacy groups and pharmacists in sounding the alarm over what these centralized price controls will mean for patients. We argued that by forcing pharmacists to sell a product at such an unreasonably low rate across the board, government was risking the viability of pharmacies and ultimately the availability of medicines for Alberta patients. We said it would result in drug shortages and price spikes as drug companies struggle and in some cases outright refuse to cooperate with a plan that they weren't consulted on.

Not surprisingly, the government said that we were fearmongering. But here we are today, and less than 2 per cent of generic drugs are selling at the government's desired rate of 18 per cent below brand name prices. In fact, Mr. Speaker, more drugs have increased in price than have achieved the 18 per cent target.

The reality is that drug companies are trying. They've managed to bring down most drug prices to 25 per cent of brand name prices, a good solution for patients and a workable model for pharmacists, but this minister is insistent that 25 per cent isn't good enough. He is steamrolling ahead with his 18 per cent, at-all-costs approach. This is a bankrupt business model that is putting patients at risk. If this minister won't listen to us, maybe he'll listen to the 25,000 people who are telling him to listen up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

County of Grande Prairie Sports Complex

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise today in order to highlight one of the largest construction projects that the county of Grande Prairie has ever undertaken, its first sports complex. The County of Grande Prairie Sportsplex opened its doors on January 2, 2013, and has been extremely well received by all of the constituents and the surrounding communities. Boasting twin NHL-size ice rinks, an indoor soccer pitch, the largest north of Calgary, and a high-tech running track plus workout facilities, this project provides the region's residents with a state-of-the-art facility to train our future sports athletes.

Moreover, the Sportsplex boosts the local economy and showcases the region as being a world-class training destination that will attract sports tourism. The facility is expected to welcome over 500,000 guests a year, including myself. When finished, it will span over 176,000 square feet, and because of its architecture and its situation close to a major highway, it will be accessible to all potential users.

In order to complete the project, funds from the county's reserves were used as well as the MSI program from the province. Our government's commitment to building Alberta through fostering the growth of families and communities is clearly evident with the County of Grande Prairie Sportsplex.

No Albertan should be prevented from being able to pursue fitness and lead a healthy lifestyle. Mr. Speaker, community facilities like the Sportsplex allow all Albertans to access the supports to live active and healthy lives, and that is why I am proud to be a part of a government that promotes this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Fort McMurray Field Trip by Garneau Students

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to take this opportunity to recognize 21 grade 6 students from Garneau school in Edmonton who headed up to Fort McMurray in the first week of May to learn about oil sands development and the responsibilities of the various levels of government. Most impressive was that this trip was solely on the students' initiative, and they enthusiastically undertook a significant fundraising effort in order to achieve that goal.

Garneau school is in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona, and I've had the opportunity to communicate to the member how impressed I was with these young men and women. They asked some very intelligent questions about the region during a Q and A

session. I was joined by Mayor Melissa Blake of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and we were both put on the hot seat. We were grilled on a range of topics from climate change, oil sands protests, highway 63 safety, protection of animals, to environmental footprint. Perhaps the most interesting question asked was about how we would deal with the negative media attention on Fort McMurray and the oil sands. As many of you know, it's been a bone of contention for many of our residents. More often than not Fort McMurray gets painted with a single stroke, a very narrow-minded, one-sided view of the region that neglects to tell the stories of the real community.

Towards the end of our session Mayor Blake asked the students if the trip was different than what they had expected, and many hands shot up. One student thought that it would all be polluted and smelly and gross but came here, saw the clear blue sky, and was completely blown away. Family-friendly spaces, art, and extracurricular activities were some of the other comments made.

Our community leaders in Fort McMurray have held many conversations to try and change this perception of us, and it's been a tough challenge. Yet from this one visit these students have kept an open mind and formed an opinion based on what they saw, not just what they heard.

I have to thank those students for their interest and for the incredibly enlightening Q and A session. Our children are our future, and I feel at ease knowing that these intelligent young men and women will be our future generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll finish off Members' Statements shortly, but in the meantime let's go on with Oral Question Period, starting with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

1:50

Health Facilities Infrastructure

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday I attended the Sikh parade in Calgary celebrating Vaisakhi. They had 40,000 people there and fed most of them out of the temple kitchen, which had undergone a recent \$500,000 renovation. It got me thinking about another kitchen renovation, the one we've been asking about at Calgary's Foothills hospital. Now, I've done some checking around on other hospital kitchen replacements. There's one in Delaware for about \$7 million. In Atlanta for \$30 million they're getting an entire new floor plus new beds, a new patient recovery area, and a new kitchen. So how in the world – and I ask this question to the Infrastructure minister – can the kitchen at the Foothills cost \$32 million?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, we continue to invest in health infrastructure right across this province. AHS's multiyear capital plan is submitted to government on a yearly basis, listing AHS's top 10 priorities for their budget cycle. We receive many priorities from all government departments and take each one seriously and determine what projects go forward. We can't build every project that everybody asks for – and I'm sure the opposition would be the same way – so we determine the priorities. They put in the list, and that's what we build.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is in AHS's top 10 priorities.

Mr. Speaker, here are some more: a kitchen renovation at St. Joseph's hospital in Syracuse, \$6 million; the kitchen at the University of Michigan hospital, \$8.5 million. Thirty-two million dollars is a staggering amount for a kitchen even in a specialized setting like the Foothills hospital. We know they've been asking for years for a kitchen replacement, yet the request gets rejected over and over again. If it's because it's too expensive, maybe someone can call the folks down in Syracuse and Delaware and get them to help us put together a cheaper plan so that we can actually get a new kitchen built at the Foothills.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as I said, Alberta Health Services puts their priorities to Alberta Health, and they bring it to Infrastructure. This priority has not been brought to Infrastructure yet. It hasn't made it through the process, but that doesn't mean it won't be in this year's cycle. May 31 is the deadline to bring the projects forward, and it may show up this year.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this has been one of their priorities since 2010.

This is the kind of thing that points to the need for a public prioritized project list like the Wildrose has been advocating for all infrastructure needs. The way this government operates, there is no criteria, no list, no priority, no information. If your project gets approved, they put it on a list. If the projects don't get approved, well, you don't know why. They don't know when. They don't know if. When will the government stop playing politics with infrastructure and publish a public prioritized list of projects?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times, the approved capital projects are on our website. Those are the projects that'll be built in the next three years. I'm not going to speculate five and 10 years down the road. It would be irresponsible because people's priorities change.

It's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. Our capital project budget is much larger than the opposition's would be. I don't know how they would get this project done with a reduced budget.

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

Ms Smith: It's got mould and asbestos in the kitchen, Mr. Speaker.

Restructuring of PDD Services

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government is undertaking a massive restructuring of services to persons with developmental disabilities, and understandably the families affected are nervous about what the changes will mean and how their loved ones will be impacted. The minister attempts to smooth things over with calm reassurances, but it rings hollow because the minister's only answer to all of the specific questions we've been asking is in essence: trust me; it'll be fine. To the Premier: assuming there is a plan, how can such sweeping changes affecting so many vulnerable Albertans be so poorly communicated and so badly managed?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't agree with the premise of the member's question. Actually, they are well communicated. This is the implementation year of changes that have been going on and were agreed to six, seven years ago with the service providers, the families, the agencies, PDD, everybody else. So here we are. Yes, there are some nervous parents out there. There are some nervous caregivers out there. I'm travelling the province.

I'm in 20 communities in the next two weeks. We're working through our issues. I can only say again that if you need care, it will be there. If you need services, they will be there.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, letters have gone out to a number of organizations who provide PDD services that they may not be funded anymore effective July 1. A lot of organizations are in smaller centres, where resources and alternatives are scarce. Does the minister have other organizations lined up to take over these critical services for PDD clients as of July 2?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, in the interests of openness and honesty we have talked about potential worst-case-scenario numbers with some of the providers, and some of them are nervous. We do not think we're going to lose any providers. I was just in the northeast today talking to service providers. We don't think we're going to lose any. We're going to achieve contracts, and this will be fine.

Ms Smith: I guess the answer to that was no, Mr. Speaker.

The minister thinks that his promise that everyone who needs services will get services is going to satisfy clients and families and staff, but it won't. He's travelling the province soon, as he mentioned, in another example of after-the-fact consultation, but isn't it a better idea to get it right before implementing sweeping changes rather than going around the province on a PDD apology tour?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is, in fact, right. We have different ideas of what consultation is. We're out there talking about the facts. They're out there talking about conjecture.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: We'd love to have some facts if only the minister would provide them.

Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has boasted about her government raising the bar on accountability and transparency, but that's just in a speech. In real life they are secretive, closed, reticent, and cryptic. Take the issue of staff severance. The Premier changes staff quite regularly, we've noticed, and the departing staff get nice packages, more than \$2 million so far. These severance and employment arrangements have been made public by her predecessors, but the Premier is hiding behind what she claims are privacy concerns. The Privacy Commissioner has already ruled that such arrangements must be disclosed. Will the Premier comply?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of our Premier this government is delivering unprecedented transparency. We delivered an expense disclosure policy that is the gold standard in Canada. We delivered whistle-blower legislation. This is a government that is not only talking about transparency; it is delivering transparency.

Ms Smith: In that case, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the minister tabling the documents detailing the severances.

I asked about this issue in Executive Council estimates. I wanted the Premier to give us a separate line item that stated the costs and the details of who got let go and at what cost. The Premier said no at the time, but in recent media interviews she agreed to do it next year. Why is the Premier so reluctant to provide a full accounting of these kinds of expenses? How bad is it?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we have a respect for independent processes. There is an independent Privacy Commissioner. That is the proper process for requests like this to be dealt with. That's exactly where it is, and that's the right process to follow.

Ms Smith: The Privacy Commissioner gave permission. They should just release it.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's office has a pretty large staff, especially on the communications side. There's been a lot of turnover there already, but the school kids communication blunder followed by the junk mail in PC Party colours suggests that there might be more severance ahead. Will the Premier comply with the previous Privacy Commissioner's rulings and release the information about who is getting what?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the only severances I see forthcoming would be about 17 after the next election. [interjections]

Let me tell you this, Mr. Speaker. It's been a tradition not only of this government but, I imagine, all governments in this country that when a FOIP request comes in, those decisions are not political. They're never made by politicians. Information that is requested, if appropriate, is released. Please put in a specific request, and if it is appropriate according to our FOIP legislation, it shall be released.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we learned that the Premier's office has spent a whopping \$2.1 million on severance payments in the past three years with absolutely no details regarding the exorbitant expense. That's a lot of money, guys. Secrecy, waste, and golden handshakes: hallmarks of this Conservative government that continue despite the new leader. To the Premier: how big are these payments, and why won't you reveal how many people received these severance payments?

2:00

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, this member has been in the Legislature long enough to know how FOIP processes work. When any member of the public, media, or the opposition puts in a request, that request is reviewed by FOIP officers, and if it's appropriate, if it doesn't breach any laws, that information is routinely released. As a matter of fact, they probably cost taxpayers more than any member of our Premier's office in putting in FOIPs. They know how the process works. I'm not sure what that question is all about.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I've been in the Legislature long enough to see these guys waste a lot of taxpayer money; in fact, \$586,000 in Premier's office expense severance payments in the last year alone. That's more than twice the \$220,000 in funding required to keep the music enrichment program at Victoria school of the arts alive. The fact that the Premier is trying to conceal information about the cost of high turnover in her office at a time when so many programs are being cut is simply outrageous. Premier, why are golden handshakes for former staffers more important to your government than this popular and valuable music program and other programs important to Albertans?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, like with any employer, there is a rotation of staff. When there are contractual obligations, those obligations are paid. That happens in the private sector. It happens in the public sector. We treat our employees properly. However, if

that particular member has any questions relevant to any settlements, if they are within the scope of legislation, if we are able to release them, we obviously will. The fact is that individuals who work for the government of Alberta expect some of their information to be kept private, but whatever is available for release will be released.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's a generally accepted principle in the public and private sector that high turnover is a result of either bad employees or a bad boss. To the Premier: which is it? Will you please fix the problem? It's costing us a lot of money.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that we pride ourselves on all the employees. I know that accusations often fall from the opposition, accusing employees of the government of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, and others, who work really hard every day and make great decisions and deliver great services for Albertans. But perhaps some of them don't like to work in a caustic environment like this, as caused by the opposition, so they move on, perhaps into the private sector. This government will always defend our employees. They're doing a fine job.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's office has spent more than \$2 million on severance since 2010. In the Premier's first year in office alone that number was nearly \$1.3 million. Whether it's bad judgment in hiring staff in the first place or bad management once she's hired them, it doesn't matter. What matters is that this Premier obviously expects Albertans to pay for her office's outrageous severance costs without explaining who this money is going to and why. My question is to the Premier. Why won't you release the details of the outrageous severance costs of your office?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good to know that all three opposition parties read the same newspaper. That's really good research. But that member in particular should know that if he has any questions relevant to remuneration, terms of employment, or any information relevant to the government of Alberta, there is a very transparent FOIP process. As a matter of fact, it was recently known to be the golden standard of Canadian FOIP processes. Put in a request. Ask for specific information. Don't throw spaghetti against the wall and hope that something sticks. Be specific. You shall receive the answers.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not throwing spaghetti, but there are some meatballs involved here, I think.

This Premier's office has become a very expensive revolving door. With severance payments like this, obviously not all is well in the Premier's office. Only this government would force the opposition to go through an expensive, time-consuming process under FOIP legislation to get public information and then blame the opposition for the costs. Albertans deserve to know whose severance they're paying for and why. Will you release this information without a FOIP process, and if not, why not?

Mr. Lukaszuk: What this member is actually asking in other terms is: will you bypass the law and release information here simply because I'm politically grandstanding? The answer is no. If there is any particular information that you want access to that pertains to Albertans, employees of the government of Alberta,

fine Albertans – individuals' privacy must be protected, must be secured – put in a proper request. You shall receive the answers.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, is the Deputy Premier telling us that if the government releases information that's not covered by FOIP that should be publicly disclosed and has been routinely publicly disclosed in the past, the government is breaking the law?

Mr. Lukaszuk: No, Mr. Speaker, that's not what I'm saying at all. What I'm saying is that – thank you for underlining the fact that this information is routinely released. The reason it is routinely released is because proper FOIP requests are being put in. If you put in a proper FOIP request – again, just like you said earlier, routinely that information is released – it shall be released to you as well.

Bathing Protocols for Persons in Care

Mrs. Towle: Mr. Speaker, there's another government failure affecting seniors in care. You'll recall that the government finally agreed with the opposition that one bath per week was unconscionable and implemented a two-bath-per-week policy for all seniors in care. That was the promise, but the reality is very different. Seniors in care are not getting two baths a week, and they're lucky to even get one bath per week. Minister, help me understand how this works. You're the minister, your government made the promise of two baths per week, yet it's still not happening. How can this be interpreted as anything other than another broken promise?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting from this member that she, too, like I and every member here, wants the best that we can do for our seniors in this province. The bathing issue was brought to the table. We responded, and we said that over time this would be resolved. The bathing issue was defined as baths, showers, sponge baths, full bed baths and would follow the care plan that was given by professionals and families that were consulted with.

Mrs. Towle: Wow. What a very disappointing answer. They're not even getting two baths a week, two showers a week, two sponge baths, however you want to do it.

Given that recently in a facility in central Alberta a senior was forced to go an entire week without a bath after having an accident because one of the two bath team members called in sick and given that this means the senior didn't get a bath that week at all, does the government honestly think that it's acceptable for a senior to sit in their own mess for more than a week after promising two baths a week?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that's acceptable is the best possible care that our seniors and our loved ones can get in our facilities across this province. We have caring, loving people that take care of our seniors. We have policies in place to make sure that the seniors get that care. I can assure you there's not a week that goes by that I don't travel to a seniors' facility, that I don't question staff, that I don't question residents, that I don't question families, and that I don't get questions and concerns, too. I have to tell you that nowhere else in this country do seniors get the quality care that they deserve as in Alberta.

Mrs. Towle: Let's be clear. These questions are coming from all over Alberta, and they're taking care of their loved ones, and those front-line staff workers are taking care of their loved ones. Given that we all agree that two baths a week in a seniors' facility is not

a luxury and given that this government made a promise of two baths per week and seniors are barely even getting one, how can the minister expect anyone to believe this claim that no one cares more about seniors than the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you again. Not to politicize this issue – this issue is very, very serious, and it's about the care of our loved ones in our facilities – but I will strive to do everything I can to the last breath in my body to make sure that the seniors in this province get only the best care possible, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Market Access for Alberta Products

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Building market access to ensure we get fair value for our natural resources is economic job one for this government. However, there are small and medium-sized businesses and agricultural producers throughout this province who rely on more diverse markets for their products. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What are you doing to support the needs of these business owners?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. When we speak about bolstering markets, we're talking about a broad range of products and services available to businesses right throughout Alberta. There are several departments, including my own, that can provide services to small and medium-sized businesses, whether they're in the agricultural community, manufacturing, technology, a number of different areas. Of course, they can utilize our trade offices internationally to support that. Last year 640 businesses did just that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Casey: Thank you. Given that information and access to these services is often difficult to find, what is the minister doing to ensure services are available to small-business owners?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege of visiting around Alberta to 10 different communities, talking with small and medium-sized businesses, community economic developers, community leaders about the opportunities and about what government can do to help them get ready to export. These communities learned more about the services that the Alberta government provides. As well, we provided an overview of international trade opportunities, a presentation on Alberta's economic picture, and, of course, took a look at services that were available.

Mr. Casey: To the same minister: given that we're in competition with other regions and countries in the world, what is his department doing to break into markets like India and China, where a rapidly growing middle class clearly needs the food and energy Alberta can supply?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right. We are in a very competitive global economy. Of course, the timing of the question is perfect as our Premier's vision is that we need a more focused, strategic process for the province's international

relations. Very soon we'll be introducing a renewed international strategy, and of course we'll make sure that we're working towards common goals and making the most of our opportunities in these new markets.

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

Postsecondary Education Program Eliminations

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Last month in response to a question about program cuts at Alberta colleges and universities the minister of advanced education said that no program would be eliminated without his approval. Well, we are starting to see the impact being felt in postsecondary institutions from cuts. A quick count shows five institutions have released their planned program cuts, and that would result in 28 programs being cut or curtailed. We need clarity for students trying to plan their future and for postsecondary institutions trying to set their year's agenda. Will the minister be signing off on these cuts, yes or no?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, last week that member scheduled a meeting with me in my office to sit down and talk about those things. He simply didn't show up. It's unfortunate because I would have had the time to explain it to him.

However, the process remains the same. Colleges and universities will be sending forward a list of programs that they're planning to eliminate, and then the department and my office inclusively will be reviewing that list and making sure that programs that are eliminated are ones that can otherwise be reasonably delivered to students in a different fashion or ones that are simply not subscribed to by many students.

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order at 2:13:30 has been noted.

Proceed with the second question.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, I assure you that if I had scheduled a meeting, I would have been at it. I did try and do a meeting when the budget was announced. The minister was on a beach at the time if you'll recall.

Mr. Speaker, given that many of these potential cuts involve courses that train for positions in desperately needed front-line services such as licensed practical nursing, health care aides, and pharmacy technicians how can the minister say that this is good for students, much less the province, when there is a workers' shortage in many of these occupations in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, on the other hand, did show up for that meeting. We both waited for that member. He did find out that we will be looking at programs from the vantage point of: what was the level of enrolment? We will be looking at whether these programs can be delivered otherwise, through different institutions. But at the end of the day there will be some difficult decisions to be made, and we will be making them in view of what's best for the student.

Mr. McAllister: That gets us to the heart of the matter, what's best for the student, Mr. Speaker.

Given that we are losing programs in practical nursing, engineering, disability studies, aging studies, prenatal and neonatal nursing, sign language, health care, just to name a few, and given that we still haven't seen a cut list from three other colleges and

five universities, including the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, aren't you concerned, Minister, that your quest to find savings is hurting students and, in turn, the Alberta economy?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I can't be more clear. No programs have been lost. The review hasn't happened.

This is rather rich coming from the Wildrose Party, that wanted us to cut deeper and more drastically. Imagine what programs would actually definitely be eliminated if we listened to their budget. But what's more interesting is that advanced education doesn't even appear in their budget document, so that member has very little credibility to speak about cuts in education.

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

Road Construction Safety

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today. Alberta is a beautiful place, and it's definitely beautiful in the summertime. All Albertans are out and about and planning their summer and getting ready for a summer vacation. You know what? This province is facing a lot of growth, a hundred thousand people a year. To the Minister of Transportation. We expect our roads and bridges to take us where we want safely and securely, but, you know, the people that actually build this province, the Albertans on the road doing that work: what are we doing to keep them safe, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public safety is one of the Premier's priorities. This morning I had the privilege of launching the Partners in Road Construction Safety annual event. That's very important because most years there are a thousand incidences of collisions in actual construction areas. We've got Albertans out there working to make the roads safer, to make them more efficient both for our economy and for our quality of life. We work with partnerships. One of the most important partnerships is with the drivers on Alberta roads.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, given that I've been a paramedic and I've gone to those scenes where people have been working on the roads and have been fatally hurt, can the minister explain to this House and to all Albertans how they can be part of the traffic safety solution?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we get to talk about this all the time, and it's important that we do because it's an important topic. I guess one thing that I would say to Alberta drivers is: hang up the phone. That's a good start. I would say: pay attention. When you're in construction areas, just obey the flag people. Actually, it's sad that I'm saying this out loud and that I have to, but the fact remains that a certain number of Albertans actually don't do that. Because of that, some of our workers get killed, get injured. We're not asking; we're demanding. Through the Justice minister we'll ask the police to go out and write as many tickets as we can because our workers deserve no less.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, everything starts with a plan, and as Albertans get out there to plan their summer holidays, can the minister tell me how Albertans can go online and find out where road construction is taking place so they can plan effectively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the things that we do is that we ask drivers, when they can, particularly if they're going to be in a time crunch, to do a little research to find out what's going on. We recommend that they go to the website 511.alberta.ca. They'll find orange pylons on the map there that tell them where construction sites are. They'll get road conditions. In fact, some Albertans are catching on. Since we launched this program, there have been more than 33 million web hits, more than 250,000 phone calls, 10,000 Twitter followers. We would encourage all Albertans, particularly during the summer season with lots of construction, to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago the Minister of Transportation said that he would carefully examine the costs and benefits of mandatory helmet use for all-terrain vehicle use in Alberta. An average of 14 deaths occur every year in Alberta, including children. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research have proven that helmets save lives, reduce severe injury, and reduce health costs. They, along with 84 per cent of Albertans in this government's own survey in 2008, said that they want mandatory helmets. To the minister: why does the government continue to drag its feet on this basic public health issue?

The Speaker: The hon. Transportation minister.

2:20

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, and I know it's coming from an honest place from him. I actually have done what I said to the hon. member. I've looked into this. But also on the same survey 93 per cent of the respondents said that it's the responsibility of parents, adults, and guardians to ensure their children use helmets. Nonetheless, we are not finished doing our research. We are going down this road. We're going to try to make a decision that's in the best interests of all Albertans, and when we do, we will most certainly announce it to this House and to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the minister: what information exactly is the minister looking for to make this decision?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I understand the member's impatience, but it's important we get this right. I would also say that while this is about public safety, I'm a motorcycle rider, and one thing I can tell you is that already this year we've heard of several deaths of motorcycle riders. You have to wear a helmet to ride a motorcycle in this province. I only say that to indicate the fact that helmets will not solve all the deaths. They are a piece of public safety equipment, and they're important. But we have an education program. We encourage parents and responsible adults to behave properly, and that's the number one thing, but we'll do the research on the others still.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's a puzzle to me, Mr. Speaker, what extra research the minister is looking for unless it's political. This is a life-saving measure. We're talking about children dying every year. What is a life worth, Mr. Minister?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, you know, there are two things Albertans that want to be safe can rely on, for adults their own common sense and for children their parents. Helmets are something we are looking at, but no one should think that it's any kind of magic elixir, a silver bullet. A lot of the deaths on ATVs are from crushing injuries, where the vehicle rolls over on top of them. Helmets in many cases won't stop this. Nonetheless, the hon. member has a legitimate concern. We're legitimately going through the process, and when we get finished going through the process, as I said earlier, we will announce it to Albertans and to this House.

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

Aboriginal Consultations

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government failed to consult with First Nations while developing legislation about a consultation levy with First Nations. The irony of this is so overwhelming that even the most trusting and optimistic observers are rolling their eyes. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: can you tell this House and First Nations why, when developing legislation regarding consultation with First Nations, they failed to consult First Nations?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't talk about the levy because it's being debated before the House right now, but I can tell you that in the last year I've spent all my time on the landscape visiting with First Nations communities, meeting with Métis settlements, talking to chiefs and communities. I can tell you that one of the Premier's mandates to me is to make sure that we put a proper consultation process in place that deals with the socioeconomic problems that our First Nations face in this province and this country. I can say to you that we will continue to consult with First Nations, and we will make sure we have programs and the educational tools in place to make sure First Nations have a proper place at the table.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that on Friday the Minister of Aboriginal Relations told this Assembly that this PC government had consulted with treaties 6 and 8 and given that treaties 6 and 8 stated that they were not consulted on this government's newest policy affecting a First Nations consultation levy, is the minister calling treaties 6 and 8 liars?

The Speaker: Let's be careful with our words, hon. members.

Minister, would you wish to dignify that with an answer?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say to you that I have consulted with Treaty 7, Treaty 8, and Treaty 6 at the grand chief level. I can tell you that we've talked about the levy. I can tell you that we've talked about the levy within our technicians' meetings with the three different treaty organizations. We've talked to the chiefs about the levy. If there is any issue, there might be some misinformation between the meetings between the technicians and the chiefs. But I can tell you that since we've started this consultation process, we've been very clear with the First Nations about the levy, and we've been very clear to industry about the levy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, that's not what they're telling the opposition.

Given that for years this PC government has refused to treat First Nations as equal partners or to engage them in meaningful consultation and given that First Nations are fed up with being ignored and patronized by this government, to the same minister: when will this government end its hypocritical and dishonest relationship with First Nations and finally treat them as equal partners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't like the word "dishonest," and I think maybe the member should be careful with some of the words he uses in his questioning.

I will say this. We have a very healthy relationship with the First Nations in this province, and we continue to build that relationship. I can tell you that our Premier and her cabinet met with the First Nations on December 1 of last year. I can tell you that I've visited now 30 First Nations communities in this province. I can tell you that the respect and the trust is growing, and we will continue to work with our First Nations partners to make sure they have a seat at the table and that we solve the socioeconomic problems that they're facing today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Generic Drug Pricing

Mr. Saskiw: This government's centralized price controls on generic drugs has backfired. Albertans have been hit in the pocketbook with dramatic price spikes for some medications, and the program has failed to meet its targets. Today Jody Shkrobot, an Edmonton pharmacist and the former president of the Canadian Pharmacists Association, is speaking out. He has brought a petition to the Legislature with more than 25,000 signatures on it urging the government to reconsider this risky scheme. To the associate minister of Health: if you won't listen to pharmacists, will you at least listen to the 25,000 everyday Albertans who are begging you to back down?

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the comments. To the people that have come here today to watch this question, I want to tell you that we will strive to reduce drug prices for all Albertans. We believe that there is an opportunity for some cost savings for all Albertans in this venture. We know that in our first month of drug price reductions Albertans have seen savings and will continue to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the associate minister of Health: given that pharmacists are trying to co-operate with your reckless plan, will you stop forcing this bankrupt business model on pharmacies that is needlessly putting patients at risk? Please answer the question.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is trying to get to the point that there are reported drug shortages. Through this plan there will be absolutely no drugs that will be delisted when there's not an alternative in place.

Maybe the member would like to come out to Whitecourt for the opening of the new drugstore that we have in our community. There are still business opportunities that our druggists see and our pharmacists see. They are valued members of our communities. They are valued businesspeople. I've heard from many of them that there's an opportunity with the drug price reduction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the associate minister of Health: given that your reckless and centralized plan is causing administrative nightmares for pharmacists with constant and unpredictable changes to the drug list, will you hit the brakes on this plan, replace it with something workable for pharmacists, and for a change ensure affordable and accessible medicine for all Albertans? Please answer the question, sir.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you to the member for the question. I think that, like his leader, we do agree, when pharmacists aren't in the audience, that savings for Albertans are very, very important. We know that overall drug prices have come down and will continue to come down. This is very, very important. We think that there are savings of up to \$90 million of Alberta taxpayers' hard-earned money. We respect that.

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

Inquiries into Violation of Legislation

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. The Election Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act lay out a process whereby an investigation can be launched into specific violations of the legislation. How is it that anyone in Alberta can make accusations against another Albertan when the sole purpose may be to besmirch their name?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Both the elections legislation and the conflicts of interest legislation allow for the findings to be posted online. The purpose of the legislation, again, is to ensure that we have an independent authority deciding these. It's not to run people's names through the mud. At the end of the day if that's been done, anybody in the Assembly who has done this inadvertently or advertently should just simply go and apologize.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, is there a mechanism to offload the costs of an investigation, especially if it's found to be more of a witch hunt than an investigation?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I definitely agree that there have been witch hunts in this area as well. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence here is that they are paid for by the taxpayer. These are offices that are funded by the taxpayer. The least the individuals could do is to simply go and apologize. I'm not suggesting that they resign, but we need an apology.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, if government money is involved, how do we prevent this leakage of government dollars to frivolous claims?

2:30

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, there actually is a screening process, in which case the independent authority here, be it the conflict-of-interest commissioner or people at Elections Alberta, can actually punt claims, and it has happened before. Realistically, again, I think that every person in this Chamber should act honourably and not submit frivolous or vexatious claims. Let's let the process work itself independently.

Thank you.

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

Nordegg Wildfire

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday residents in the hamlet of Nordegg were put on a one-hour evacuation notice due to an out-of-control forest fire. From Thursday through Friday no updates appeared on the ESRD website. Given the immediate danger why wasn't the ESRD website updated with current information in a timely fashion?

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were working very carefully with the community, with the reeve, and the council to make sure that they had all the resources that they needed. Job one for us is to make sure that the citizens are protected, that we get the fires under control, and that we do everything we can to help the rural and urban municipalities get the situation under control. Then we make sure that everyone else is notified. They have done an excellent job: our wildfire teams, all emergency people, and both municipalities.

Mr. Anglin: I'm not talking about the wildfire teams.

Given that on Saturday afternoon residents were told that the fire had been contained and less than an hour later a notice of evacuation was posted on the website, can the minister explain why residents that voluntarily left their homes were directed back into harm's way?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, this just speaks to how little this member understands the situation. We cannot control Mother Nature. Although we may want to, we don't have control. We worked with the community to make sure all the systems were in place in the event the winds changed. We thought the winds would change; they did change. I was there last evening, Mr. Speaker. I was at the EOC, at the evacuation centre, and at the SRD building, making sure that they had everything they needed in place. That community and the people that worked and are continuing to work on that situation are doing an outstanding job. Shame on this member for not commending them for that.

Mr. Anglin: Shame on you for putting my friends in harm's way.

Knowing the lessons we learned from the Slave Lake fire of a couple of years ago, can the minister explain how the residents that do not have telephones, cellphones, Internet, or Twitter get information under these emergency conditions?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, shame on him for that comment.

The county has worked extremely hard, as have SRD and the emergency management system, to make sure that all of those constituents and residents were taken care of. The Red Cross was there last evening, and if the member had stopped in, he might have seen that. They have done an outstanding job working over the four days so that in the event – and unfortunately that was the event that happened yesterday – that we had to evacuate, everybody, first and foremost, was taking care of the people and their pets and making sure that they were safe.

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

Postsecondary Institutions Land-use Regulation

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Post-secondary Learning Act there are three Alberta universities – Lethbridge, Calgary, Alberta – that have an exemption from local planning processes. The associated land-use regulation lays out that primarily commercial development is not exempt. The regulation also outlines consultation requirements. To the Deputy Premier, Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education: with the expiry of the land-use regulation, will you commit to a consultation process with the communities and municipalities about potential changes to the regulation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes, most definitely. But I have to qualify it with the fact that the existing regulation actually has worked quite well in most areas of the province, and I imagine that universities and neighbours of our fine universities have done very well by each other. There have been situations where from time to time there was a conflict, as often occurs when a new development takes place, where perhaps some additional consultation would have helped. We will review this regulation because at the end of the day we want our communities to be welcoming of universities and for both of them to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot of disagreement about what consultation is. Will the minister provide clarification on what constitutes consultation under the current regulation? Is it simply providing information after the fact about what has been decided, or is it involving the stakeholders in the process?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we want to make sure that the consultation is meaningful and that input from both parties – the developer, in this case the university, and the neighbours – is taken into consideration and also provides the basis for how land will be developed. We expect universities, much like we expect any developer in the province of Alberta, to engage with their potential future neighbours because at the end of the day they will have to live side by side for many, many years to come.

Mr. Young: What are the timelines for this consultation, and will you commit to working with the community organizations South Campus Neighbourhood Coalition and Preserve Garneau, that were formed in direct response to this exemption, when you're conducting this review of the regulation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, as with all consultations, we will open them to the general public, and those who are interested will be more than welcome to participate. So if there are groups – and I know there are some – who are organized around particular developments, they will have ample opportunity to provide us input. Also, the universities and other neighbours will be giving us information that will be required to draft the new regulation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Restructuring of PDD Services

(continued)

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's cuts to day programs for vulnerable Albertans are causing fear and

confusion. A resident in my constituency doesn't know what she's going to do with her adult son after these cuts take effect. He has Down syndrome, diabetes, and celiac disease, and he wants to enter the workforce but simply can't without the added supports from the front-line groups that are being cut. The PDD minister's cross-your-fingers-and-hope-for-the-best approach is a failure of leadership. Will the minister admit that he has botched this service transition, delay the July 1 deadline, and make sure that Albertans' fears are addressed?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I think I pretty clearly signalled that we're out there working with the service providers, talking to them. We're talking to families as well. I understand the concerns that are out there. We believed that we could achieve a July 1 deadline, and in some respects I still believe that, but I also said pretty clearly in here and out there that we need to work together with the service providers. I clearly get that transition is an issue, and I'm working on it.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister was practically booed out of a recent meeting in Calgary because he couldn't provide essential details of his transition plan, can he now fill us in on where he is taking these programs, or is he just making it up as he goes along?

Mr. Oberle: I was not practically booed out of a meeting in Calgary, Mr. Speaker, and I don't recall accidentally wandering into a Wildrose meeting, so I'm not sure what the member is talking about.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister's best response to the pending July 1 changes is "We'll see how the transition goes," does the minister not realize that his own lack of confidence and planning is causing a world of distress and worry for affected Albertans?

Mr. Oberle: I absolutely do realize that, and I think I just said that a minute ago, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely do realize the concerns that are out there, and we're working to address them. I've talked to a heck of a lot more people than that hon. member has, and I will continue to do that. We're going to work with the people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Farmers' Markets

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very proud of our agricultural industry and the innovation of our producers in developing markets for their locally grown products. I and my family alike enjoy going to the popular Alberta farmers' markets, but a good business case needs good metrics. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Can you give us an indication of the economic value of farmers' markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Olson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The farmers' markets, as I'm sure we are all aware because we observe it, are becoming more and more popular. Just even in the last number of years they've actually tripled in their value. Since 2004 they've tripled in size to about \$724 million worth of business, and \$600 million of that is for locally grown produce, locally made products, so obviously it's something that Albertans value greatly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that this sector of the agricultural economy has such a huge impact, what is the ministry doing to further develop and promote farmers' markets?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're supporting farmers' markets in a number of ways. We provide advice and support through my department. We also have been undertaking a study just to see what other types of initiatives, what other types of options might be appropriate. We're looking at things like farm retail and agricultural box programs, specialty restaurants, those types of things. My understanding is that the study is complete, and we're now looking at these options and seeing how we might be able to help. But it's certain that the regional exhibitions and other community groups that are running these are seeing just an explosion of interest.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that Albertans within the urban centres are able to visit farmers' markets throughout the year. In your study will we be able to see what will assist in creating these farmers' markets in the winter in the rural areas as well?

Mr. Olson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would make sense that in the rural areas, where the produce is coming from, it should be available in the winter. I'm sure that that will happen; it already is happening, I know from my own experience. This is something that's growing. We're seeing more and more markets opening. Just for the May long weekend, now, we'll see a lot of them opening. There are 130 authorized farmers' markets. Many of them are now operating year-round. They're certainly working year-round. If somebody wants to know where they can find a farmer's market, there is a website. It's called www.sunnygirl.ca, all small case.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, through your good co-operation 102 questions and answers were delivered today. That is a proud moment for all of you.

Secondly, the point of order enunciated by Airdrie at 2:13:30 has been withdrawn by the member himself, so there will be no point of order later.

Before we go back to Members' Statements, might we have your consent to revert briefly to introductions at this time? Is anyone opposed to that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you two members of the WCB that are visiting us today, Janet Welch and Laurie Dobbs. Janet Welch is the manager of government relations with the WCB. With her is Laurie Dobbs, one of the three government relations advisors. Janet and her team have many years of experience. Janet has been with the organization 16 years. Laurie

has 23 years of experience. Obviously, they both started when they were 12. They take pride in their role of assisting all MLAs with WCB inquiries. I'd ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

If not, then in 22 seconds from now we will resume Members' Statements, and we'll start with Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Skills Canada Alberta Competition

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really excited about an event that's taking place this week. I'd like to recognize the competitors, their families, certainly the sponsors always, the volunteers, and the organizers of the 2013 provincial Skills competition. It's taking place Wednesday and Thursday this week. The nearly 700 competitors from across the province are competing in more than 40 trades and technology events from website development and robotics to culinary arts and cabinetmaking.

These competitions are high school and postsecondary related, mostly students who have demonstrated exceptional skill, determination, and commitment. They know that a career in the skilled trades is a great choice and wanted to put the knowledge and expertise they've gained to the ultimate test. They're gathering at the Edmonton Expo Centre at Northlands in the hopes of achieving goals that they have set for themselves. I welcome all to drop in. For some this could mean earning an opportunity to represent Team Alberta at the national Skills competition in Vancouver next month.

The provincial Skills competition is a wonderful showcase of the value and importance of the skilled trades and technology in our province. It speaks highly to the calibre of Alberta's youth, our schools and postsecondary institutions, and the strength of the province's apprenticeship and industry training system.

Through this competition young people have an opportunity to build on the skills they've learned through initiatives like the registered apprenticeship program, career and technology studies, dual credit programs, and technical training in our postsecondary institutions. They are learning leadership, teamwork, problem-solving skills. This will help them prepare for future careers as skilled trades professionals, business owners, managers, teachers, and instructors.

Once again I'd like to offer good luck to all the competitors and my sincerest thanks to Skills Canada Alberta, the volunteers who are working so hard to make this happen, and to the many sponsors of the competition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Asian Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the contributions of immigrants from dozens of countries in Asia who have been choosing to make Canada their home for more than a hundred years. We are a nation of immigrants, and Canada is richer for the many rich contribu-

tions of the Asian community in areas such as business, science, engineering, and the arts.

One of the reasons immigrants have been able to enjoy such success in this country is that governments have helped by providing opportunities for newcomers to move to Canada in the first place and by providing ESL and settlement services, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, we are seeing governments at the federal and provincial levels move away from these good policies. The federal government has made it more difficult for people to become permanent residents, but they have allowed an increase in temporary foreign workers, men and women who are often exploited.

Alberta Liberals want to see more permanent residents, Mr. Speaker. If somebody is good enough to work here, he or she is good enough to settle here. We also want to see an increase in ESL funding so that all newcomers can gain the language skills they need to integrate into their new communities and to reach their full potential. I'm an immigrant myself, and I know how important these programs are.

Mr. Speaker, Asian Heritage Month is a great time to remember the contributions of immigrants and their children to this great country. Let us strengthen the programs which help to make that happen so that new immigrants can build on the contributions of those who came before them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think I have a couple of indications here of petitions to be presented. If there are petitions to be presented, could you please ensure that among the first words you use are these, that "this petition has been approved as to form by Parliamentary Counsel," and then go on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition, with the appropriate number of copies, with 1,560 signatures and approved by Parliamentary Counsel. The petition demands that government keep the Michener Centre "open for the vulnerable Albertans with severe developmental disabilities who have called Michener home for decades, which would allow them to live out their lives with peace, dignity and stability." This petition shows how this particular broken promise is out of touch with the priorities of people at Michener Centre.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. member, has that been approved as to form by Parliamentary Counsel? That's what I was asking.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, it sure has.

The Speaker: It has?

Mr. Eggen: I did say that as well.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Calgary-McCall, let's try your version.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly brought forth by concerned Alberta pharmacists and their patients. This petition has been approved as to form by Parliamentary Counsel. This petition was signed by thousands of people from across Alberta urging the government to "implement policy that will ensure that the access

to and quality of the services currently provided by community pharmacies and pharmacists in Alberta is preserved.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your leave, I have two petitions that have been reviewed and approved by Parliamentary Counsel. I rise today to table a petition, this chunk of it, that has been signed by over 12,000 Albertans. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to implement policy that will ensure that the access to and quality of the services . . . provided by community pharmacies and pharmacists in Alberta is preserved.

That’s one of them.

The second petition I have, that has also been approved, simply maintains the same statement, but at the end there’s a slight difference. It states that the policy be maintained rather than preserved.

2:50

The third petition that I have is a petition that was collected in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler and states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to implement policy that will ensure that the access to and quality of the services currently provided by community pharmacies and pharmacists in Alberta is preserved.

There are 1,173 signatures from that particular constituency.

I have a final petition that is, I believe, from the constituency of Banff-Cochrane, and there are a bunch of signatures from Lethbridge as well. It also states that they want the current policies to be preserved.

I think the number of these signatures from all across Alberta demonstrates the need for the government to reconsider its ill-advised approach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This petition has been approved as to form, and it is to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the Legislature assembled:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the [Alberta] Legislative Assembly to keep Michener Centre in Red Deer open for the vulnerable Albertans with severe developmental disabilities who have called Michener home for decades, which would allow them to live out their lives with peace, dignity and stability.

I have the requisite number of copies with 1,560 signatures each.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, can we assume that your petitions were all approved as to form?

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Every single one of them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Every one? Thank you.
Are there others?

Hon. members, just before we proceed on with the next section, could I beg your indulgence to return briefly to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees? Yes? Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act, proceed in the Assembly with amendments and that Bill Pr. 2, Wild Rose Agricultural Producers Amendment Act, 2013, proceed in the Assembly with amendments. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the recommended amendments to Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 2. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the member who has just spoken has requested concurrence in the report he just read. Those of you who concur, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those who do not, please say no. So ordered and so carried.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of the introduction of Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act.

I would also give oral notice of a second motion.

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 77(2), Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act, may be advanced two or more stages in one day and that if Bill 26 has not yet been introduced, then immediately following the passage of this motion, the Assembly shall revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture, followed by the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate numbers of copies of a letter sent to the *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald*, that was printed today. The letter was written by Bill Evans, the executive director of Alberta Media Production Industries Association, AMPPIA, who was introduced earlier. It is a response to an article printed in the *Journal* and the *Herald* on May 8 titled Film Tax Credit Earns All-party Support. This letter is intended to clear up some inaccuracies that AMPPIA found within that article, and I believe it will bring some clarity and understanding to recent discussions in this House regarding tax credits for the film industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m very excited today to rise and table some important information about worker safety in our province. The WCB runs a partnership in injury reduction, PIR, program in concert with Alberta Human Services, industry partners, safety associations, employers, and labour groups. PIR

offers premium incentives to registered employers who obtain a certificate of recognition, and those employers can earn rebates of up to 20 per cent by reducing the number and impact of workplace injuries.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have two tablings in regard to this initiative. First is a list of 37 award winners, who were invited to luncheon banquets in Edmonton and Calgary.

The second is a list of over 9,000 employers who received rebates in WCB premiums. Mr. Speaker, those over 9,000 employers will be sharing over \$89 million in PIR refunds this year. My personal thanks from this government to those great employers out there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table a letter sent to the Minister of Human Services from a woman who has provided quality community access programs to adults living with developmental disabilities in Lethbridge for more than 25 years. She is very concerned about this government's cuts and believes they will bring about a negative quality of life to those who access her programs.

Thank you.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago during question period the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View misled the House and advised that he never had a meeting scheduled in my office and de facto insinuated that I am misleading the House. Here is a letter sent from the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's office indicating that he is happy to meet with me on the 7th of May at 9 o'clock in the morning. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner had shown up for that meeting; the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View had not.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling here that is around the Michener Centre, put together by the friends of Michener Centre. It's done in the form of a petition, but it's not in order to be presented to the House as a petition. They are asking the Legislative Assembly to

keep Michener Centre in Red Deer open for the vulnerable Albertans with severe development disabilities who have called Michener home for decades, which would allow them to live out their lives with peace, dignity and stability.

I'm tabling the requisite five copies of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Lacombe-Ponoka, please.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table three e-mails that my office received. Two letters I quoted from last week when we were speaking on the bare-land condo issue. The third e-mail I received this morning from Anne Murgg about the impending closure of the Michener Centre. She states that closing Michener Centre is "the worst thing this government can do . . . Closing Michener center will be devastating to the people that have called this home." I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, did you have a tabling?

Ms Calahasen: Yes, I've got a tabling, Mr. Speaker. This is five copies of the letter I read on behalf of the MD of Lesser Slave River in my member's statement earlier today, for any individual to be able to have access to this wonderful, wonderful thank you.

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. Lukaszuk, Deputy Premier and Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education, pursuant to the Agrology Profession Act the Alberta Institute of Agrologists' 67th annual general meeting report, dated March 26, 2013; pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects' 2012 annual report; pursuant to the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta's 2012 annual report; pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists' 2012 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the Routine for today. Let us move on.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: I call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 203

Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour and privilege for me to speak to Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, which has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-South West. I must say that I want to give the member some incredible kudos on his bill, and I'm so thrilled to hear that he's brought this forward.

Bill 203 would amend the current Employment Standards Code to include provisions for up to eight weeks of unpaid compassionate care leave for workers who are charged with the task of having to care for a dying loved one in their final days.

Mr. Chair, I recognize the value of this bill because I've recently faced this gruelling task. When you're facing a task like this, you are in a somewhat difficult position, where you think: I can't believe this situation is happening to me. Words alone cannot express how much I appreciated the opportunity to be able to spend some quality time with my mom. It gave us the opportunity to laugh. It gave us the opportunity to cry. It gave us the opportunity to share the good times and the bad times, and yes, the unbelievable opportunity to say goodbye. I can't even imagine not having this opportunity, and it saddens me in so many ways that people don't have the opportunity or the time to spend with their loved ones.

I spent six weeks between the hospital and the hospice, and there's no monetary value that could ever be placed on this. The unique experience that I had in the hospice is something that I'll never forget. Watching people come to visit with their loved ones

touched me in so many ways. The idea of being able to party in your room, bring the family pet for a visit, the opportunity to visit whenever you wanted, whether it was day or night, means so much to families.

This bill will recognize the compassionate side that is so important not only for the loved one as they face their dying days, but it also allows a family member to spend the quality time that is so much needed. The mental stress, the guilt one feels at not being able to be with their loved one is something that doesn't go away after that loved one passes on.

We as a society respect each other's human dignity in birth, in life, and in death. It is fundamental to who we are as people. Work is measurable – it is something we do – but as I indicated, the final moments with a loved one are something that you never get back. I support Bill 203 because it promotes an agreeable level of human decency and affords peace of mind for all Albertans who have to go down this terrible road.

As they say, death is simply a fact of life, and the death of a loved one is something everyone will have to deal with at one time or another. The incredible ability to be there as they make their way into the next journey of their life is something I will never forget, and I want to thank the member from the bottom of my heart for bringing this bill forward.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for sharing her personal story today. It's a pleasure to rise during the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203 Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. I would like to thank my colleagues from both sides of the House for sharing their thoughts, comments, and support over the course of second reading. I would also like to thank organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society and Pilgrims Hospice, who are here in the gallery today, and other stakeholders across Alberta who have endorsed this bill as beneficial to all Albertans.

First, I would like to quickly review the key components of Bill 203. This bill was created to improve the lives of Albertans. It was designed to allow individuals the opportunity to provide care for terminally ill loved ones without having to doubt their job security.

This bill is highly important and timely in what it provides for Albertans. All hon. members are aware that this bill would make Alberta the last province to include a provision for compassionate care leave in its employment standards legislation. However, the structure and content of this bill is similar to that of existing provisions for other types of leave such as maternity and reservist leave.

I would like to briefly discuss section 1, which reads, "The Employment Standards Code is amended by this Act." This section highlights the Employment Standards Code as the proper piece of legislation under which to address the issue of compassionate caregiving.

Mr. Chair, stakeholder consultations have made clear that end-of-life scenarios resulting from severe illness, advanced age, or other causes are greatly impactful on the family. As such, it is not surprising to find that those who have entered a palliative state prefer and often require care in their own homes and, moreover, care and comfort that is provided by loved ones.

Clearly, in order to make this type of care available to those who need it, the question of caregivers' employment must be addressed. While it is well and good that many employers see fit

to grant their employees this type of leave to care for loved ones, no standardized piece of legislation is yet in place to guarantee consistency in this regard. Thus, section 1 of the bill directs the amendment that would facilitate this province-wide consistency to the piece of legislation that protects the rights of employees in the province. No individual can adequately fulfill the substantial burdens and responsibilities of compassionate caregiving and job retention when it's a constant worry. As such, it is under the purview of employment and employment standards that compassionate caregivers must be protected, much like those requiring maternity leave, for instance.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to discuss division 7.2. This is a section that defines compassionate care leave and, importantly, who is eligible to claim for it. This definition is given in what would become section 53.9 of the Employment Standards Code. It is under this section of the bill that individuals entitled to take compassionate care leave are identified and defined. Perhaps most important among these is defining what constitutes a primary caregiver and a family member. Section 53.9 would define a family member in relation to an employee as a spouse or common-law partner, the employee's child or parent, as well as a child or parent of the employee, spouse, or common-law partner. The final part of the definition of family member also includes "any other person who is a member of a class of persons designated in the regulations for the purpose of this definition." This section defines primary care giver as, "an individual who has primary responsibility for providing care or support to a seriously ill family member for that family."

Bill 203 could go a long way in helping family members acting as primary caregivers to ill loved ones to perform that role while also retaining gainful employment. Clearly, Mr. Chair, Bill 203 provides great benefits to Albertans. It could impact our lives on many different levels. It is essential that we as government and as elected members of this Assembly continue to address the importance of compassionate caregiving to our society as a whole, to our families and communities, and to our health care system.

Alberta is already the best place to live and work in the world. Bill 203 would only enhance that. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, what Bill 203 proposes has the potential to make all the difference in the world.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to the committee debate on Bill 203. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with some interest and pleasure to speak to Bill 203. I believe it's my first opportunity to do so, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this forward. I think that there's a lot of good to be had here, and we would like to offer some suggestions to perhaps make it even better.

3:10

Under current federal legislation, Mr. Chair, workers are entitled to take up to eight weeks of leave within a six-month period to care for a relative who is at risk of passing on. The leave is unpaid, so workers can apply for employment insurance, right? However, it's up to the province to ensure that workers still have a job waiting for them when their leave is over. In every other province provincial legislation guarantees your position when you are taking compassionate care leave. Saskatchewan has 16 weeks of protected leave, Quebec has 12, and British Columbia eight weeks.

I think we are correcting an obvious problem that needs to be adjusted here, and I'm glad that we are finally doing so. I would like to offer my first amendment, then, in regard to this bill if I could pass that forward.

The Chair: We'll circulate it. Maybe just pause for half a minute. Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll call this amendment A1, hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Now known as amendment A1, I'm presenting this on behalf of my colleague for Edmonton-Strathcona. She is moving that Bill 203, Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012, be amended in section 6 as follows.

Part A, in the proposed section 53.9 strikes out subsection (2) and substitutes the following:

(2) Subject to subsections (3) to (7), an employee is entitled to compassionate care leave of up to 8 weeks to provide care or support to a seriously ill family member if the employee is the primary care-giver.

Part B, in the proposed section 53.9 strikes out subsection (6) and substitutes the following:

(6) An employee may take up to 8 periods of compassionate care leave totalling no more than 8 weeks, but any subsequent period of leave must end no later than 26 weeks after the first period of leave began.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona worked in conjunction with the Canadian Cancer Society to craft this amendment, and I would like to as well express my thanks to the public policy analysts and legal researchers at the Canadian Cancer Society who worked with the Alberta New Democrat caucus to ensure that this amendment would be brought forward today. I do hope that members of all parties in this House will see fit to support these very reasonable changes.

As I read into the *Hansard* already, the first section removes any reference to an employee having completed at least 52 consecutive weeks with an employer. The second part allows employees to take up to eight compassionate care leaves totalling no more than eight weeks within half a year. This amendment, Mr. Chair, is designed to ensure that all Albertans can take compassionate care leave and at the right time that they need to.

Part A of this amendment removes that reference to employees having the service of one year. This amendment will ensure that compassionate care leave is accessible to all employees regardless of how long they have been with their current employer. It should be noted that the threshold to qualify for EI care benefits is 600 hours of work in the previous 52 weeks, which need not have been with the same employer. Thus, under Bill 203 as it's currently written, if they changed jobs in the last year, Albertans could have enough hours to apply for EI compassionate but still not have the protection of this bill because they didn't have the 52 consecutive weeks with a current employer. This amendment resolves that problem, Mr. Chair.

Section B recognizes that two instalments of compassionate care leave are not, in fact, practical. EI compassionate care benefits can be taken in instalments as short as one week, with no maximum of instalments, to an eight-week maximum ceiling. Thus, EI compassionate care benefits are flexible enough to be taken in up to eight one-week instalments, but Bill 203 as it's currently written would not provide that job protection to Albertans who need to break their leave into more than two instalments.

As we are all aware, caregivers are often needed most when their loved ones are undergoing radiation or other treatments with severe side effects such as nausea and, of course, pain. Individual treatment schedules can vary considerably. Based on the needs of the patient, requiring caregivers to schedule their leave in no more than two instalments would make it difficult or even impossible for some people to be there when they're needed the most. Alberta's Employment Standards Code as well should allow compassionate care leave to be broken up into as many as eight one-week instalments within the 26-week benefits period.

Again, I would like to thank the Canadian Cancer Society for working with us, the Alberta New Democrats, to bring this amendment to the floor of the House. I would urge all members to give their support to this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm just rising to request unanimous consent of the House that all divisions today up until the adjournment this evening be on a one-minute bell.

The Chair: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, in anticipation of your request I did do a little bit of checking, and it turns out that our rules require that the standing orders can only be waived in the House. Since we're in committee, unfortunately, I can't put that question.

Mr. Denis: You learn something new every day, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

I will then recognize the next speaker. Speaking on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Calder for bringing forward this amendment. It's almost like we were anticipating something like this as I have speaking notes ready to go.

Section 53.9(6) currently reads: "An employee may take up to 2 periods of compassionate care leave totalling no more than 8 weeks, but any second period of leave must end no later than 26 weeks after the first period of leave began." Mr. Chair, the period of leave as currently defined under Bill 203 was determined through careful consideration and consultation. It should be noted that a maximum leave of eight weeks is the standard time frame allotted by most other jurisdictions, with a few exceptions as noted by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. Thus, as it currently reads, Bill 203 is consistent with similar standards of compassionate care leave legislation, including those at the federal level.

As it impacts caregivers and others affected by this legislation, a careful account had to be taken to balance the needs of caregivers with fairness to employers. Mr. Chair, as important as it is to ensure that caregivers are given everything they need in order to fulfill their roles in supporting their loved ones, they're not the only people who are impacted by this legislation. The needs of employers and small businesses must also be considered. This is why section 53.9(6) defines both a limit on leave length and the window of opportunity within which leave can be taken.

Consultations revealed that any terminal illness will likely run its course within a period of 26 weeks. This is why 26 weeks was chosen as a reasonable time frame within which to take compassionate care leave to care for a terminally ill loved one. Accordingly, Mr. Chair, section 53.9(3) states that a physician's

note that an employee would present to his or her employer would indicate that the ill family member is at “significant risk of death within the 26 weeks.” The eight-week period was decided upon as a reasonable length of time that balances a caregiver’s needs with those of his or her employer, who, understandably, cannot always afford the luxury of losing employees for indefinite periods of time. This is especially the case with employers in smaller businesses.

Compassionate caregiving is a multifaceted and impactful topic, and it affects many people both directly and indirectly. This is why Bill 203 was designed in a manner that protects and takes into account the diverse range of people that can and will be affected by it. This is why I feel that the length of the period of leave as currently laid out in the bill is reasonable and appropriate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:20

The Chair: Are there other speakers on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I’ll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. I recognize the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m pleased to see the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West’s bill reach Committee of the Whole before time runs out this session. I think this piece of legislation is incredibly pertinent to the situations that many of our constituents find themselves in today. When we have an aging problem, we know that finding solutions to meet the needs of and to care for this demographic is important to improving the overall quality and availability of health care in Alberta, but we also know that we have to balance this need with the reality of employers and what they have to face, especially those running smaller operations.

As a former employer I want to speak to how section 53.9(6) achieves this balance. Subsection (6) reads as follows: “An employee may take up to 2 periods of compassionate care leave totalling no more than 8 weeks, but any second period of leave must end no later than 26 weeks after the first period of leave began.” In short, employees must confine their eight weeks of leave to a 26-week period. This section relates to section 53.9(3)(a), which requires the employee to provide a certificate from a physician stating that “a family member of the employee has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks.”

It’s my understanding that this 26-week period was borrowed from and is, therefore, consistent with that which we see in other provinces in Canada. British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario all use this 26-week time frame. Saskatchewan, on the other hand, allows an employee to take the leave within a 52-week period. Mind you, Saskatchewan also allots double the amount of time an employee is allowed to take as leave. It’s 16 weeks.

When we’re looking at the 26-week time period, we have to look at the practicality of this legislation for employers. It seems to me that an employee needing to take off eight weeks intermittently would create a lot of uncertainty for the employer, knowing that oftentimes leave is requested at the last minute, without much notice, in this circumstance because illness is unpredictable. I think that insisting upon a 26-week time period would help mitigate the uncertainty caused by an employee’s absence. This allows the employer to know that it’s only for 26 weeks that this uncertainty exists and that after that, they would regain the full commitment of the employee who was on leave. It provides a

degree of certainty for the employer, knowing that necessary arrangements to deal with the shortage of the employee need to be made but only for a six-month period. From the perspective of an employer allowing the eight weeks to be taken during, say, a 52-week period does leave things too open ended. So I think this 26-week time period mitigates any unfair disadvantage or inconvenience for employers.

I also think that to remain consistent with other parts of the legislation, it makes sense to maintain the 26-week time period. To recall, subsection (3)(a) states that the family member must have “a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death” within the 26-week period. It also makes sense that the employee taking leave must use it within this 26-week period; otherwise, time taken off would no longer be to provide compassionate care. Time taken off beyond the 26-week period would have to be categorized as something else such as time off for grief. To reiterate, this 26-week time period makes sense to me.

I support this legislation as a whole, and I would like to commend the hon. member for taking into consideration the various aspects of compassionate care leave that would impact the employer and the employee. This 26-week time period is an example of the balance this legislation strikes between practicality and sympathy. It’s consistent with other jurisdictions and found to be effective and workable, and I see no reason why Alberta cannot offer the same.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my comments. I look forward to the rest of the debate and urge all of my colleagues to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I’m going to recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I did some research since we last spoke. Your motion to shorten the bells for the rest of the afternoon would not be in order, but a motion to shorten the bells for committee would be. Any subsequent motion for the House would have to be done once we’re back in the Legislature. So if you’re willing to make a motion to shorten the bells for the duration of committee, I would entertain it.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would ask for unanimous consent of all members to shorten any bells in Committee of the Whole to one minute.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: I recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It’s a great pleasure for me to speak on Bill 203, Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. I also have a personal experience as my mom passed away in November. I know how hard it is for a family working and trying to take care of a loved one at the same time. I have first-hand experience. You know, we were lucky because we’ve got a big family, so many family members were out there to be with my mom. Somebody was always there to look after her. Those 26 weeks: you know, a doctor can give a note that a person is going to go in two weeks or three weeks, but sometimes it goes on forever. In my mom’s case it was a long time.

Definitely this is a very good bill. It’s very timely and needed. This will help a long way for the families who take care of their loved ones in their last days. This will allow more time for the families to be together with their loved ones, you know, to share their laughs and to probably share their grief and all of that.

I just have, you know, one concern here. We have taken a long time to amend this code. In that time, many citizens, presumably mostly women, have had to suffer the financial difficulties that arise from the government dragging their feet on this. My only concern is that 52 weeks is long compared to maybe other jurisdictions. What if a child becomes very ill on the employee's 51st week of work? Perhaps a three-month period of time may be in order as this is the typical time it takes to decide the employee's suitability for retention by a company. So, I mean, that's a little sticking point there.

I think other than that, Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this bill. This will finally help the families who are in need of this.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will be supporting this bill. Any shortcomings probably can be straightened out later on if not now. I think we should do it right the first time so that we don't have to go back to the bill again.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour and a privilege to rise once again to support Bill 203, the Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012. Many people know and have heard probably one too many times the story of our family and the difference it made for my mom to be able to stay with my brother at all times. Unfortunately, she was not able to take advantage of the kind of leave that this bill would give to many employees across Alberta. I know that she would have appreciated the opportunity to have been given leave to spend 24 hours a day with her son while he passed versus just any other minute that she possibly had.

Interestingly enough, this weekend our family lost our grandma. Our family took care of our grandma. My husband's family took care of our grandma every day. They're farmers. And while this leave doesn't extend to them, I saw first-hand the value that you get when family members have the opportunity to spend time and take care of their loved ones in their home. I was very fortunate that my husband's grandma was taken care of by my wonderful mother-in-law, who every day would go over and make sure that she was well fed, dressed, you know, bathed, all of those things, so that she was able to live independently on the farm with her son and his family, being my father-in-law. And she appreciated that.

3:30

She did not want to go into a facility. She did not want to be cared for. What that showed to us in our family was the value that family members bring to the table when they're taking care of someone. Although we're one of the last provinces to adopt a law such as this, we know that across this province, as many times as we're able to make sure that we're out there taking care of our loved ones without fear of losing our job, without fear of losing our seniority, without fear of having any negative retribution for us just for doing the right thing, it's always a better day for Albertans when we can do that.

Especially, I think the timelines of this bill are incredibly important. As a small-business owner myself I can appreciate the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park's comments about how this is a delicate balance and a good balance between the needs of the employee, who we're looking out for here, but also the needs of the employer, that it's not a cost to the employer, that there is a way to be compassionate, that it actually can be seen as a benefit

for employers to be offering this kind of leave to employees as well.

We've seen it at the federal level. They're implementing this type of bill. Now we're following suit, which I think is a very positive step. I applaud the Member for Edmonton-South West for all of his hard work on this bill, I applaud the member for bringing forward a bill that all parties can support, and I also applaud the member for his hard work and his diligence in explaining to Albertans and explaining to members of this House the value and the compassion that a bill like this will provide to all Albertans.

I thank him for this bill. I will support this bill, and I encourage every member of the House to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to stand today to speak again in support of Bill 203, which will extend compassionate care to so many hard-working Albertans. As we know, this bill will expand the ability for people to take leave from their employment. This leave must be certified by a physician, and there are still reasonable limitations to this. It's a good bill. It provides leave for those who wish or need to take care of dying family members. It provides them with the job security they need.

As we know, Alberta is the last province to adopt this protection for workers, and this is a good step forward. If someone takes compassionate care leave, they keep their job, they keep their benefits, they keep their level of pay, and they keep their seniority. I think we can all agree these are good things.

There are some downsides to the bill, as there are with almost everything we do. I wish to raise them although I don't think these outweigh the positives that will come from this bill. First, it doesn't go nearly as far as the Wildrose palliative care proposal, which would provide EI-style coverage for family members caring for their loved ones.

Second, this bill has some severe repercussions potentially for small businesses. When an employee leaves for up to eight weeks, it can leave a gaping hole in a small organization and cause headaches and bottlenecks for them. However, I think there are very few small-business owners who would not be willing to grant compassionate care leave. They've probably been doing it now already.

Overall, Mr. Chair, I'm glad to rise and speak in support of the bill. This expansion of compassionate care leave for hard-working Albertans is overdue, and with the passage of the bill, we'll become the last province to ensure job security while Albertans are caring for their loved ones. It will reduce worry and hardship for people that are already under an immense amount of stress and will no longer force Albertans to choose between their families and their jobs.

With that, I look forward to voting in favour of this bill. I appreciate it being brought forward, and I look forward to it becoming law. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

If there are no other speakers, I'll call the question on the bill.

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 203 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to make a motion?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 203.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 203. I wish to table copies of an amendment considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

**Bill 203
Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave)
Amendment Act, 2012**

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move it for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 206
Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products)
Amendment Act, 2012**

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

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and present Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012.

Typically we go off some of the notes that have been prepared for us. I think people know that quite often I like to speak from my heart. You know, yesterday I was running in south Fish Creek park, and as I was running, I was remembering my mother, seeing as how it was Mother's Day. A few years back, in late 2009, roughly, my mother passed away. She passed away after she battled cancer. Being a paramedic, I've never seen anybody have to battle cancer in such a, I guess, disheartening way.

From being her son, I mean, it went from receiving the call one day – again, having some strained relationships with my mother over the years, as she left us when we were younger, as we started to repair, I guess, our adult relationship, to have her call me was kind of out of the blue. I knew immediately when she called that something wasn't right. I heard it in her voice. This is a lady that I know, the person who taught me how to fight, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the person who taught me how to get down in the ditches and work your fingers to the bone, and the person that, unquestionably, while not to perfection, taught me how to be tough.

Mr. Speaker, at a very young age my mother started smoking. And there's no doubt, with my health background experience, that it was the smoking that killed her. It was the tobacco and the chemicals and everything that took her life all too soon and never gave us the opportunity to actually build our relationship as adults, for me as an adult to understand some of the pain that she might have gone through that made her make the decision to leave us at a very young age.

So, Mr. Speaker, when asked to take over and sponsor this bill, it was an easy thing for me because it essentially speaks to how we are marketing tobacco products to our children. Essentially, what this is going to do is that it is going to take away the opportunity for children to make a poor choice, to be able to afford cheap cigarettes, those flavoured cigarettes.

3:40

I guess, Mr. Speaker, when we think about it, when we think about confectionery or we think about candy, we think about tasty treats and things. We think about *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. I mean, it becomes very clear that when we talk about confectionery and candy products, when we think about cherry or strawberry or chocolate flavouring and all these things, we think about kids. We think about a happy time. Instead, what we've seen is that the people who produce these types of products are duping our children into becoming addicted or making a choice based on a false premise. Again, you know, part of the reason why I ran and why I'm sure everybody in this room ran was to help our children to make better decisions and not be duped into decisions that could ultimately shorten their lives or shorten their ability to enjoy life to its fullest.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? I don't believe for one second there's one person here in this House or anywhere else – and in some of the tobacco groups that have actually come and talked to me about this bill, not one of them smokes. Not one of them uses those products. So we know. It is not condemning those who smoke or anything else, but this is to curb the appeal of these products that ultimately kill our loved ones. They kill our mothers, our fathers, our aunts, our uncles, and other people that we've known throughout the years.

Mr. Speaker, I won't continue to talk. People know I like to talk, but with something as important as this, I hope that all members of this House support this bill as part of a tobacco reduction campaign within this government to protect the people that we love.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Before I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd rise again to ask for unanimous consent of the House for one-minute bells during this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion by the Deputy Government House Leader, I'll ask one question. Is anyone opposed to the motion?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-South East. I'm yet again surprised and somewhat pleased, if I may say, to see that we have a preamble in a bill – I think it's the second one I've seen. I can't comment so much on private members' bills, but I know that when I was speaking to the government bill, the Children First Act, it was the first time in a long time I've seen these whereases in the preamble. I always find them quite interesting and quite enlightening. You know, they're what you call the guts of the bill.

I want to read into the record what the Member for Calgary-South East has brought forward. It talks about:

Whereas the popularity of flavoured tobacco among youth is increasing their risk of developing a dangerous and lasting addiction to tobacco products;

Whereas other jurisdictions have recognized the need to restrict the sale of certain tobacco products that are designed to attract young persons; and

Whereas there is a need in Alberta to curb consumption of tobacco products among youth by restricting the sale of flavoured tobacco.

It goes on to:

Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows . . .

Then we go through the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be able to stand up in this Legislature and support the bill from the Member for Calgary-South East. I know that that may surprise some people. As members of the opposition we're always supposed to be against what the government does. You know, we're never against complimenting the government if they bring forward something that we like.

I had spoken in favour of the Children First Act from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud because I thought, initially looking at the bill, it was a solid piece of legislation. I mentioned in my speaking notes when I first got up to speak to the bill in second reading that I liked what was contained in the bill and that I would like to take the weekend to look over the bill and then, you know, listen to what people have to say, which is the role of any MLA in this Legislature. We're now seeing amendments come forward.

I have to say that I like what is contained in this bill, and I think the member has captured a lot of good things in this bill. Having said that, we all know that when a bill is going through the processes of government, somebody always comes up with a better idea, and sometimes they have some suggestions for the bill. I think when we're in second reading – and I can't imagine this bill going through the entire process in this Legislative Assembly – it'll give people the opportunity to digest what's contained in Bill 206, including myself and all members of the Assembly. Then they can go home, and they can get some feedback if this is what needs to be contained in the bill.

You know, the reason I say that is that we had the scrap metal bill introduced into the Legislature sometime ago and passed a couple of weeks ago, I guess, but I can't even remember how

many amendments had been brought forward to strengthen that particular bill and make it a better bill. I'm hoping that as we proceed through the summer, we will be able to have time for some of the people out there to take a look at the bill and say: well, gee; this needs to be done to strengthen this bill.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, I have a long history on this smoking issue. It goes back to 1993 – and there you go, aging yourself again – after attending a policy conference with the PCs and getting into quite the debate with one of the advocates against smoking. I notice that he's up in the gallery, Mr. Les Hagen. He and I had quite the debate way back when about smoking. I had all of this in my mind about people's freedom to choose, the rights of individuals, and all of those things. Sometimes in life you get a rude awakening. Sometimes there are people that are a lot smarter than you are and a lot more knowledgeable than you are on some issues. I went home as this new MLA thinking I knew everything about anything, and I decided that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was in regard to smoking.

So now we're on Bill 206 on the flavoured tobacco, and for all members of the opposition and, I'm sure, all members of the Assembly it's been a very, very busy time with us being in the Legislature, and as members of the opposition we have to do a lot of research on a lot of bills that hit this Legislature floor. As everybody knows, I had to take some time off when I was spending some time with my mom as she was so sick. So I have to admit that I haven't done a lot of research on this particular bill, but in the couple of hours that I've had, I've pulled out some interesting articles in regard to flavoured tobacco. I have to say that I was quite taken aback in regard to the articles that I did find on the number of children or youth, if you may call them that – I guess they're called youth at this particular age – that have taken up this flavoured tobacco.

I pulled an article out of the *Journal* – and it's interesting because Mr. Hagen is up there, and I guess it was a press conference that he attended – in regard to stats. One of the stats that I found enlightening was that of Alberta students surveyed who said they used tobacco, 64 per cent were consuming some kind of flavoured product. That ranked ahead of the national average, which was 59 per cent. I love to brag about Alberta, but I certainly don't think we should claim bragging rights on flavoured tobacco products.

The survey found that the most popular product was flavoured cigarillos that come in a container that looks like lip gloss and cost about \$2. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I'm not up on flavoured tobacco, and I'm not up on cigarillo information. I wasn't even aware, to be very honest with you, that they had flavoured tobacco or flavoured cigarillos other than Colts, which have been around forever. I forget what flavour it comes in, but it's been around for a long, long time. But I was quite startled to see that we had all of these wonderful flavours. My kids are grown, so I'm not dealing with those teenage years that some of the members in this Assembly probably are. I guess I have to be a little more open minded and a little more observant of what's happening.

Alberta students also ranked ahead of the national standard in consumption of menthol cigarettes. I didn't even know they still made menthol cigarettes. I was raised in the era of du Maurier, Player's. All of these things are starting to – spit tobacco. This one is interesting: water-pipe tobacco. I hadn't even heard of such a thing.

3:50

What is interesting is the flavours that these come in. One of the articles that I pulled off the Internet said that they have the same

flavours as they have in ice cream. I found that quite fascinating. Flavoured additives are used to mask negative attributes of smoking such as flavour, unpleasant odour, and packaging aroma. All of these things are something that we don't normally like about smoking.

I'm one of those ex-smokers, but I'm not one of those smokers that go around shaking my finger at everybody. I just know that it's very addictive. I'll fall off, and then I'll climb back on the horse, and then I'll fall off, and then I'm back on the horse. There isn't one thing I personally like about smoking. Not one thing. It doesn't relax me. It doesn't calm me down. It doesn't make me feel any better about myself. It's that incredible nicotine and that incredible addiction that this nasty, nasty habit gives to people.

Flavoured tobacco makes inhaling the products seem easier and makes the smoke milder. Studies have shown that flavoured tobacco is popular with minors, which I talked about, particularly in the form of cigarillos. Cigarillos are small cigars that resemble a cigarette in look and feel and are packaged to look like candy, lipstick, and/or markers.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and tell the hon. member that I will be supporting his bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak to Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, and I congratulate the Member for Calgary-South East for bringing this bill forward.

Cancer is an issue all over the world, and Punjab back home is one of those belts. Lots of people are suffering from cancer, but that's a different kind of cancer. Anything we can do for people to stay away from tobacco products will help us, you know, save money in productivity and health care. This bill will do that, especially curbing young folks, maybe, from trying these products.

The general purpose of this bill is to limit the introduction of tobacco to young Albertans so as to attempt to avoid addiction to tobacco early in life. This bill also prohibits the sale of all flavoured tobacco products in Alberta, and all delivery methods, including water pipes, are covered under this new legislation, so whatever wasn't covered before, Mr. Speaker. This act will amend the Tobacco Reduction Act.

In 2011 Health Canada revised the Tobacco Act to reduce tobacco marketing to youth. The legislation was developed to protect youth from tobacco industry marketing practices, and this didn't apply to water pipes. Quebec prohibits the use of water-pipe smoking regardless of whether the product contains tobacco or not. The city of Vancouver has a bylaw, too, that prohibits the use of water pipes in public places, Mr. Speaker. Two water-pipe shop owners in Vancouver have tried to challenge that, but, you know, we will see.

Flavour additives are used to mask the negative attributes of smoking such as flavour, unpleasant odour, and packaging aromas. Flavoured tobacco makes inhaling the products seem easier and makes the smoke feel milder. Two common flavours, licorice and cocoa, have been found to produce carcinogens when burned.

Studies have shown that flavoured tobacco is popular with minors, particularly in the form of cigarillos. Cigarillos are small cigars that resemble a cigarette in look and feel and are packaged to look like candy, lipstick, and/or markers. These harmful products come in flavours that appeal to children such as fruit, candy, and even ice cream flavours. Because cigarillos are rolled

in tobacco leaves rather than paper, they are exempt from regulations that require health warnings and restrictions on packaging sizes. Cigarillos are easily affordable for minors as they are available as singles for less than \$2 at a convenience store. Only 2 per cent of adult smokers use flavoured tobacco.

A study done by the University of Waterloo, a youth smoking survey between 2006-07, has shown that 35 per cent of Canadian youth have tried cigarillos. Health Canada stats show that unit sales of cigarillos skyrocketed to more than 80 million units in 2006. They were just 50,000 units five years earlier. The 2007 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey revealed that 30 per cent of teen smokers between ages 15 and 19 have used flavoured cigarillos in the past 20 days and that most use this product exclusively. The survey also revealed that 60 per cent of all cigarillo users were teens between the ages of 15 and 19. This bill will go a long way, Mr. Speaker, to curbing those teens from getting hooked on nicotine.

Water-pipe smoking is another delivery method of flavoured tobacco in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. In February 2012 the chief medical officer of health issued a report regarding water-pipe use in Alberta. "A typical waterpipe session lasts between 45 to 60 minutes. [In that] time, a waterpipe user can inhale the smoke equivalent of 100 cigarettes." That's lots of cigarettes to be having in 45 to 60 minutes.

A recent study also found that 38 per cent of North American college students had reported using a water pipe at least once. It was found that 23 per cent of young adults in a Montreal sample had used a water pipe in the previous year. The 2008 Alberta Youth Experience Survey found that 10 per cent of students between grades 7 and 12 had used a water pipe.

Water-pipe smoking in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, appears to be increasing, and businesses in Alberta are not required to have additional licences to offer water pipes to their customers. There are currently about 30 businesses offering water pipes in this province. Allowing water-pipe smoking in restaurants and bars reinforces the myth that water-pipe smoking is less harmful than cigarettes. This bill, I think, will curb water-pipe smoking, too, in Alberta.

There was a bill by the leader of the Alberta Liberals to have smoke-free vehicles. That bill has not been proclaimed, Mr. Speaker. You know, I think it would be a good idea to proclaim that bill after we pass this bill. I mean, any efforts to make Alberta smoke free and to keep tobacco products out of the hands of kids would help our economy for a long time to come. It will help the health of Albertans, it will save money on health care, and it will help our youth.

I will be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to lend my support to Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012. I think this is a good bill that will help us to curb youth smoking.

4:00

We want to aim at certain types of flavoured tobacco using regulation. I think that it's worth while pointing out, though, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a ban on all flavoured tobacco, which was called for by the campaign for a smoke-free Alberta. This is kind of a slightly smaller version of what I think was asked for by a coalition as well, which included the Alberta Public Health

Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the Lung Association as well. Plenty of research shows that youth are using the flavoured products, as was outlined by previous speakers, and there are lots of these flavoured products that have been around for quite a long time.

You know, it's the marketing and the way that these new products are perhaps being packaged as well that I think are a concern for all of us. We see that there is an exemption for menthol cigarettes, and that, I guess, is really a flavour when you think about it.

I know that there is some limitation here to what we have on this particular bill, but you've got to measure one thing against the other, Mr. Speaker, and on the whole Alberta New Democrats do support Bill 206. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 206, Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2013. This bill is yet another step toward a tobacco-free future in Alberta, and I'm so very proud to be part of this process. When I was mayor of Strathcona county, we passed the first nonsmoking bylaw in Alberta.

This fits nicely into Alberta's tobacco reduction strategy. I want to speak about the strategy because it frames Bill 206 within the context of other tobacco reduction initiatives. Alberta's strategy is a framework to guide to the development of initiatives within the province and decisions around policy. Since the introduction of the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy in 2002, tobacco use in Alberta has declined significantly. While that's very good news, Mr. Speaker, there is a worrisome upswing in youth smoking rates after years of reductions, and nearly 1 in 5 Albertans continues to use tobacco.

Alberta's new tobacco reduction strategy, *Creating Tobacco-free Futures*, builds on the momentum of the last 10 years and sets out a framework for tackling the challenges still in front of us. It's a commitment to taking steps to help people quit using tobacco, reduce harmful second-hand smoke exposure, and make tobacco products less enticing for youth. This strategy is about practical and effective initiatives, Mr. Speaker. Some of them are directions to look at into the future; others will be implemented in the short term. In particular, this strategy targets young Albertans, pregnant women, and at-risk populations. It calls for and supports action by government, health care providers, stakeholders, educators, and communities because we all need to work towards creating a tobacco-free future.

Since the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy was introduced in 2002, Alberta has achieved significant reductions in tobacco use. Smoking rates for Albertans 15 and over have fallen from 25 per cent to 19 per cent. The reduction in youth smoking was particularly encouraging. The smoking rate for youth aged 15 to 19 dropped from 24 per cent to 17 per cent. Despite this decrease, however, the 17 per cent marks an increase in youth smoking compared to the previous year, when the smoking rate was only 12 per cent. This increase illustrates that we must focus on youth going forward. Because we know that flavoured tobacco can be a gateway for youth to use other tobacco products, Bill 206 is an important step in line with this government's focus on tobacco reduction in youth.

Alberta's Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act prohibits youth from possessing, smoking, or consuming tobacco products in public places. Alberta has also introduced strong anticontraband

legislation and enforcement measures. Over the past 10 years Alberta has made significant tax increases to make tobacco products less affordable and has also implemented a tobacco reduction school strategy. The school-based and postsecondary tobacco reduction framework uses a comprehensive school-health approach that targets children in key transitional grades. This includes the development of wellness-related school curricula that acknowledge the stresses students face, especially in times of transition such as the move from junior high to high school.

Youth and young adults are engaged in tobacco, tobaccolike products, and smokeless tobacco prevention though consideration of initiatives such as supporting the expansion of evidence-informed peer leadership programs province-wide and developing and implementing youth and young adult engagement campaigns using successful campaigns in other jurisdictions as templates.

Mr. Speaker, other successes have occurred at the community level, where bylaws have been implemented to further protect Albertans from second-hand smoke. In addition, community grants have made it possible for local communities to develop and implement tobacco control initiatives. Alberta has also implemented comprehensive tobacco cessation services, including a telephone counselling line, a web-based service, and group cessation counselling.

While Alberta was markedly more smoke free in 2012 than in 2002, it's critical that tobacco reduction remains a focus. That's why Alberta has developed a new strategy. Initiatives and policies relevant to this strategy will be examined for implementation over the next 10 years.

In the short term, however, there are some significant steps that can be taken. This strategy has launched a series of important initiatives and will continue to do so over the next two years to kick-start another decade of successful reductions in tobacco use. It is anticipated that they will be funded through monies already targeted towards tobacco reduction. Any request for additional funds, should they be necessary, will become part of future budget approval processes.

The priority initiatives focusing on youth in the first three years include the development and implementation of a social marketing public awareness campaign to address the harms associated with tobacco; expansion of school-based programs, with a focus on reducing tobacco use; development and implementation of a youth engagement campaign and expansion of peer leadership programs; and expansion of community supports to enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors known to influence tobacco use.

To ensure that Alberta stays at the leading edge of tobacco reduction, this government is developing a comprehensive research and evaluation framework to measure the impacts of initiatives under the strategy.

Mr. Speaker, these early initiatives will continue the momentum of actions taken over the last 10 years and help set the groundwork for other initiatives contemplated under the 10-year time frame. As well, the strategy will adopt a phased implementation, with initiatives being introduced over the next 10 years. Phase 1 initiatives are planned to commence between 2012 and 2015, phase 2 initiatives are planned to commence between 2015 and 2018, and phase 3 initiatives are planned to commence between 2018 and 2022.

Test teams consisting of tobacco control stakeholders from across Alberta will be established to guide the implementation of the initiatives. When we look at this larger context of Alberta's tobacco reduction strategy, Bill 206 just makes sense. I think it is our duty to do whatever we can to reduce opportunities for youth to access and enjoy tobacco use. This is a critical component to prevention.

As such, I am proud to be supporting Bill 206 and trust that it will work well with this government's other tobacco reduction initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 206, the tobacco reduction amendment act, which I will be supporting today.

As the daughter of a father who smoked his whole life, I came from that traditional family back in the day when both mom and dad smoked. You came home from school, and you had the blue haze in the house. That was acceptable. Then we went out to the patio, and the blue haze just kind of came along with that. That was acceptable. I even grew up in a time when they smoked in the office, they smoked at the town office, and they even smoked at the doctor's office at that point in time. But times have changed, and this tobacco reduction amendment act would amend the Tobacco Reduction Act to make the sale of tobacco products with certain flavouring agents illegal in Alberta.

Now, I'll be the first one to stand here and say that my dad didn't get cancer from flavoured tobacco. He got it from a good, old-fashioned cigarette. He smoked his whole life. My mom has smoked since she was 11 years old. Luckily, I never took up the habit, but my brother, who is now gone, took up the habit. In my family all three of them smoked, and I did not. The end result was that my mom has had cancer twice, and my dad had throat cancer, which has now resulted in him breathing through a hole in his throat.

4:10

I can tell you that my dad was diagnosed with throat cancer at the age of 18. My dad is a very important man in my life, of course. He went from being a very strong, self-employed oil field person to a person who could no longer have a job because he now had a hole in his throat, and he no longer qualified to go on any rig site. He now coughs and breathes through the hole in his throat. It's difficult for him to be outside when there's dust. It's difficult for him, really, to be anywhere around smells and all of that. I've watched over the last 20 years the impact it had on him. He's been very fortunate that he was diagnosed with this terminal disease, and he's still here 20 years later. I have called him other names for that because I think he's stubborn. He'll probably be here for a hundred years, and I'm happy that he will be, but his smoking habits certainly didn't help him with that.

That was from a regular-flavoured cigarette, just a regular cigarette. Now they're introducing a whole different methodology with cigarettes. When you go into a convenience store today, it's astounding how many new smoking and tobacco products are available. They're sold in neon packages. They're flavoured to appeal to nontraditional tobacco users. I've been in those stores. You know, I have an 11-year-old, who sees the pretty colours and that sort of thing, but then when you tell her it's tobacco, luckily it's been pounded into her head about the problems with smoking.

Needless to say, the tobacco industry is evolving to match antismoking efforts across the globe. This is nothing new. Tobacco companies have always known their survival depends on there always being another generation of smokers who are ready to replace the current generation. In the '80s advertising firm R.J. Reynolds came up with the concept of Joe Camel. We all know Joe Camel. He was the cool, animated mascot for Camel cigarettes. Back then the regulations surrounding cigarette

advertising were very relaxed. In '91 the *Journal of the American Medical Association* did a study that found that as many young people could identify Joe Camel as they could Mickey Mouse. Since then, though, antismoking groups have worked very hard and have made great strides in denormalizing tobacco use in general society. Health agencies have reiterated the risks and costs associated with smoking in public.

I can tell you that I'm one of those people that hounds my mom every day about why she still smokes and why she wants to walk 50 metres from the nearest door to have her cigarette. Governments have taken steps to ban smoking indoors and in areas vulnerable to citizens. Yes, we've come a long way, to cite another past cigarette campaign, but major problems remain.

While the overall rates of smoking are on the decline, rates of smoking in young people have remained constant and disproportionately represent the overall number of people who smoke. In 2011 8.3 per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds and 24 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds self-identified as smokers. About 64 per cent of high school age smokers said that they smoked flavoured brands. While these numbers are about on par with the national average, I think it's important to note that Alberta represents 40 per cent of the total smokeless tobacco market, with flavoured brands leading the way.

You could go as far as to characterize these neon flavoured brands as a starter or gateway tobacco product because they start our young people on a life-long battle with addiction that's costly for the individual and for society. Smokeless tobacco products like chewing tobacco create an even greater risk component to the smoking problem as just one can of snuff contains as much tobacco as 60 cigarettes. This makes chewing tobacco significantly more addictive than smoking regular cigarettes.

While tobacco products may be changing, the fact remains that tobacco use is the leading preventable reason for premature death in Alberta. The relationship between tobacco and cancer has been well established. This year alone more than 2,000 Albertans will be diagnosed with lung cancer, and 1,500 of them will die from their disease. More than 4 out of 5 lung cancers can be attributed directly to smoking. Old habits die hard, but they can be stopped before they start.

Bill 206 is necessary because, I believe, the government has failed to deliver on previous smoking reduction promises like a ban on smoking in cars and a ban on flavoured tobacco products as well as other goals that they've listed in their 2012 strategy for tobacco reduction.

Now, we know that protecting young people from harm is important, and this is no different. We know young people can be susceptible to this kind of clever marketing, and it is up to us as legislators and, more importantly, adults to take real action on this issue.

I know that many people will make the argument: well, if we really want to ban tobacco use in our youth, then just have more enforcement. I am one hundred per cent in favour of more enforcement of exactly that law. Stores should be heavily penalized for selling tobacco to young people. A person who's selling the tobacco even should be heavily penalized. We need to make sure that if we're going to have laws in place, we're actually enforcing those laws because that's where the fundamental problem is. But in the absence of that, which is what we have right now – right now the government isn't enforcing those laws – we need to make sure that we're not encouraging them even further by adding to the problem with flavoured tobacco.

I can tell you that I already know that there are going to be some in my caucus who are not in agreement with me. That's the wonderful advantage of free votes that we have in the Wildrose,

and I'm excited to see that. But we all have different life experiences. My different life experience is that I lived with cancer – I saw what it did to our family directly – and I'm opposed to smoking. I think we should do everything we can to reduce the effects of smoking and do everything we can to encourage people to quit smoking if they want to, and I don't see that we do enough there. But I'm a hundred per cent opposed to doing anything that promotes smoking, that actually encourages people to take up smoking, but that goes even further, that actually encourages our young people to take up smoking.

Nine provinces have provincial legislation in place to curb tobacco sales to minors. Alberta is the only remaining place without such legislation. The alarming number of young people who smoke is evidence. Current federal legislation that bars the furnishing of tobacco to minors in public is not enough to beat this problem. We need creative efforts from provincial legislators if we're going to get serious about curbing smoking in our youth. Reducing the prevalence of smoking through real legislative efforts will result long term in a healthier population and a reduction of smoking rates, which, in turn, reduces health care costs for the province and, additionally, costs to the taxpayer.

In 2000 the government passed the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act. It was updated in 2004. It's a perfect example of what I mean when I say that current legislation doesn't do enough to protect our young people from tobacco companies. Essentially, the act prevents youth from possessing or smoking tobacco in a public place. I think all members can agree that this policy actually fails our youth. I personally know of many, many youth who have the ability to smoke or have access to cigarettes, to purchase cigarettes, and that shouldn't happen. So if we're actually going to do our part here, then we'd better make sure we put in legislation that we can actually enforce. If we're not going to enforce the nonselling of tobacco products to minors, then we'd better make sure that we start enforcing the rules on the tobacco companies to make sure they're not encouraging minors to start.

Last month we wore daffodil pins as we recognized Cancer Awareness Month, and we showed our support for the ongoing fight against cancer. We honoured the long and life-altering road to recovery that cancer patients in this province are on. I'm going to show my support by doing my part to prevent our young people from picking up that first cigarette. Starting our children off on the road to a tobacco-free lifestyle is one of the greatest gifts we can give them.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East. I would like to thank the hon. member for his efforts on this bill. Bill 206 focuses on an important issue, reducing tobacco use, and, most importantly, reducing tobacco use among young people and first-time users.

Mr. Speaker, tobacco use is one of the most preventable causes of death in Canada. Smoking not only affects the health of those who smoke but also of those who inhale second-hand smoke. Our government works very hard to promote healthy living through several tobacco legislations by regulating underage access to tobacco and prohibiting smoking in many public places. Our government has the responsibility to ensure that the youth of this province are raised in a healthy environment and that they are able

to make healthy choices. Education combined with strict tobacco regulation is necessary for achieving this goal.

4:20

The government of Alberta has authority under the Constitution Act, 1867, to prohibit the sale and to regulate advertisement of tobacco products. Bill 206, which would expand our current Tobacco Reduction Act to include prohibition of flavoured tobacco, would fall in line with our government's mandate of preventing youth smoking. As such, this would help Albertans lead healthier lives and, in effect, reduce smoking-related diseases.

Alberta has always played an active role in regulating the sale of tobacco products. Bill 206 aims to reduce the allure of tobacco products to persons under the age of 18 by prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco products. Historically, flavoured tobacco has been used as a way to mask the harsh flavour of tobacco. Tobacco companies have been inserting additives into tobacco products for a long time in order to make their products less harsh and more flavourful. For young people and first-time smokers flavoured tobacco products could be a tempting choice. Bill 206 would ban the sale of flavoured tobacco products within Alberta, making tobacco products less attractive to our youth. Doing so would align with the government of Alberta's strategies for reducing tobacco use.

Mr. Speaker, over the years our government has put in continuous effort to limit tobacco use. We have legislation in place that prohibits tobacco in public places, in front of doorways, and near air intake vents. The consumption of tobacco products by those less than 18 years of age is always prohibited by law.

Despite the government's efforts and intentions to reduce tobacco use, the reality is that there is still underage tobacco use. In 1999 tobacco use among youth aged 15 to 19 was 26 per cent. As outlined in Alberta's tobacco reduction strategy, which is the province's overarching plan to reduce tobacco consumption, our target was to reduce this age group's smoking rate to 9 per cent or less by 2011-2012. I'm happy to note that our tobacco reduction strategy is working, and there is a decrease in tobacco use in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 the rate of smoking among those 15 to 18 years of age was 8.3 per cent.

On April 1, 2003, the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act came into force through proclamation. It was created in order to recognize the Legislative Assembly of Alberta's responsibility to promote the health of young people by restricting their access to tobacco products. On January 1, 2008, the Tobacco Reduction Act came into effect. At first it made smoking in public places illegal. Then the second phase of the act prohibited the advertisement and display of tobacco products. Many Albertans can remember seeing cigarette displays in many retail establishments, but that was no longer the case as of July 1, 2008.

Since 2009 the province has banned the sale of tobacco products at pharmacies, health facilities, and postsecondary institutions. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, last year the Legislature passed the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012, which banned smoking in vehicles when minors are present.

Our province's antitobacco legislation has shown the commitment of this government in fighting tobacco use. As such, Bill 206 would move Alberta forward in combating tobacco use. However, there are still pending issues that are yet to be answered by this bill. Although Bill 206 could enhance the current Alberta tobacco reduction strategy, its actual effectiveness should be carefully evaluated. Our current tobacco legislation already dictates that the sale of flavoured tobacco products to minors is illegal, yet there is still a significant percentage of minors who smoke.

Some might argue that the enforcement of existing laws is more important than implementing new legislation and amendments. Making sure that we actually prohibit minors from consuming tobacco products should take precedence over banning certain products.

Flavoured tobacco products, as attractive as they might be for young people, also have a market among adults. For many Middle Easterners and Europeans flavoured tobacco use is cultural and traditional. Prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco could be seen as an infringement on such cultural practices. Although the province has a legal role in regulating the sale of tobacco products, we also need to respect all stakeholders' opinions in this input. Mr. Speaker, I agree fully with this bill's intent of helping the fight against underage tobacco use, but any decision we make could potentially affect other adult users, not just the youth.

Nonetheless, the Bill 206 objective is in line with the government's tobacco reduction strategy, and I want to thank the hon. member for his efforts in bringing this bill forward. I fully support this legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an honourable intention by the member, to bring this bill forward, but I will not support the bill. I will not support it on a number of grounds. I want to point out that I don't smoke, and I've never smoked. I don't chew – and I've never chewed – tobacco. I also lost a parent to smoking, so I am definitely sympathetic to anyone who has gone through those experiences.

But there comes a point in time. Where do we stop government's authority? I just want to point out that this bill says, "No person shall sell or offer to sell a tobacco product that contains a flavouring agent." When you look up what a flavouring agent is, it's over a thousand molecular agents. I know the example is, "Let's get rid of cherry-flavoured tobacco, peach-flavoured tobacco" and that type of flavouring. But that's not what the law says is flavouring agents, and that can be interpreted in many different ways.

Now, is this in line with the government's objective? I don't deny that. It's an honourable objective, to reduce the amount of tobacco use in our society, to keep children from using it. But our laws are many, and they are prohibitive in the sense that it's illegal to sell tobacco products to youth. Yet Alberta has a terrible record on its sales to minors ratio. Nothing in this bill is taking care of or even addressing that issue. There's absolutely no reason why our rate of selling tobacco to youth should exceed that of other provinces.

Ironically, one of the things that we're missing here is: what is the damage of tobacco? When you look at the addictive agent, nicotine, there's nothing about reducing the amount of nicotine. As a matter of fact, tobacco companies have been accused in the past of raising that level and basically increasing the addictiveness of the tobacco that they're selling. The other issue is all the carcinogens, the various agents that are in the cigarettes. There's nothing to restrict that or control that. What we're going to control are the flavouring agents.

So we have a conundrum here. What we're attempting to do, although admirable, is actually, in my view, breaching this line of the nanny state, trying to do something where I do not see that we're going to make very many gains, but we will restrict just various flavours of products.

Now, the typical thing that jumps to mind when people discuss this issue is the flavoured cigarettes, but there's a tremendous number of people that chew flavoured tobacco. Many youth do. Again, it's illegal. They're not supposed to sell tobacco products to youth.

4:30

How do we take care of this public health hazard in the sense of reducing tobacco use? Well, nobody is proposing making this health hazard illegal. The health hazard is there; it's present. We know it. It is the nicotine, it is the carcinogenic agents within the cigarettes, within the tobacco that cause the problems that we deal with in our health system, but nobody is going down that road. What we're saying is that we're just going to ban flavoured products, but there's no real definition of what flavoured products out of the thousands of molecular agents that are considered flavouring agents.

Where does this reach? This isn't clear. It won't be clear until we see what the regulations look like. But will it achieve the desired outcome that it professes, which is the goal, and actually reduce usage? I will tell you that I come from an era when children – I don't think they're any different today. They want to be grown up so fast. When they see movie actors that are their heroes or the ones they want to emulate, particularly when they're smoking, that's what they look to do. I think there are some parental issues here. I notice it in my own communities, the parents that do not mind their 12-year-olds and 10-year-olds smoking. Those 12-year-olds and 10-year-olds smoke. I'm very fortunate. Neither of my children use any tobacco products, but neither did my wife or myself.

My opposition here is strictly on the strength of what we're trying to do as a government, that we will go after flavour but we will ignore the real stuff that actually harms. We basically, by our own silence, admit that we cannot go after reduction in nicotine, that we cannot go after reduction in the carcinogenic agents in the cigarettes that actually cause the harm, so we go after the flavour. To me, it's one of those issues where we avoid the real issue and think that we're going to reduce the harm.

It's an overreaching of the power of the state, in my view. I told my members that I can't support it for that reason, as troubling as it is, because I do believe that this is an extremely harmful product. I do not argue with the member's statements on its health effects. It goes along the same line as what the mayor of New York did a couple of months ago: banned a certain size of soft drink. Now, the idea was that it would reduce the amount of soft drink that people would consume, but the fact is that they would maybe buy two or three soft drinks versus one very large one. Again, should the power of government extend that far? That's how I view this. It's admirable, it is on track, and I understand why the member would bring it forward, but it doesn't actually address the real issue, which is the agents within the tobacco that cause such significant harm to our health.

With that, I will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that both of my parents have passed away, I can confess that I did start smoking in grade 8 behind the frosty bar across from Donnan junior high school. Fortunately, I ended smoking after the first one. I had never ever been attracted to smoking or other things at the time, actually. Fortunately, back in those days they didn't have flavoured tobacco. I'm very concerned about that. I also have

travelled for years up to Nunavut and into the Arctic and have seen the effects of tobacco in the northern communities and, you know, feel compassion for the individuals who are affected by tobacco.

I think it's a good bill, and I'm pleased to rise to support it. My intention today, Mr. Speaker, is to go over some of the legislative scenarios that have happened in the province of Alberta and federally relative to tobacco.

The aim of the bill, of course, as we've heard, is to prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco products such as cigarettes, cigarillos, and smokeless tobacco. This would be done with the goal of eliminating the temptation of tobacco for persons less than 18 years of age. I believe we all recognize that the issue of underage tobacco use is one that we need to take seriously and with all due consideration. Antitobacco legislation is one way in which the fight to protect youth from tobacco use has been carried out. Therefore, when discussing antitobacco legislation, it's prudent to take a careful look at the history. As I said, I will go through that history now.

In Canada early efforts to prohibit tobacco use came about in the late 19th century. Antitobacco movements were at the time joined together with temperance and prohibition movements. Tobacco use was seen as a moral issue akin to drinking and gambling. Legislative controls can be traced back to 1903 and a free vote resolution in the House of Commons that did support a full ban, Mr. Speaker – a full ban – on tobacco products. The private member's bill that followed three weeks later failed to entrench this resolution in law as it was withdrawn on a technicality. In 1904 the same resolution was passed through the House, but it failed to receive the proper approval before the end of that particular parliamentary session.

Successful antitobacco legislation was later passed in 1908. The Tobacco Restraint Act prohibited the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 16. Those caught selling tobacco to those under the legal age were fined \$10 for the first offence, quite a sum at the time, \$25 for the second, and \$100 for the third and subsequent offences. Persons under 16 were not permitted to smoke or chew tobacco and faced fines from \$1 to \$4 for noncompliance.

The next wave of dramatic antitobacco legislation came about in 1986 and 1987, with the introduction of bills C-204 and C-51. I remember them well. Bill C-204, the Non-smokers' Health Act, was a private member's bill introduced in the House of Commons in October 1986 which proposed to reduce smoking in federally regulated workplaces as well as on planes, trains, and boats. Prior to that time I remember being, well, on all of those – planes, trains, boats, and buses – and having wafts of smoke come towards you. Mr. Speaker, you may have experienced that as well yourself.

Bill C-51 was introduced later, in April 1987, as a government bill rather than a private member's bill, and it quickly garnered a high public profile. Bill C-51, called the Tobacco Products Control Act, sought to ban tobacco advertising and sponsorships and to require health warnings on all tobacco products. Both bills met with significant industry resistance before finally passing through the House.

The federal government attempted to tackle the issue of flavoured tobacco in 2009 with an act to amend the Tobacco Act, Cracking Down on Tobacco Marketing Aimed at Youth Act, 2009, which went into force in 2010. The act outlines three measures designed to reduce marketing towards children: firstly, that no person shall sell cigarettes or cigarillos except in a package that contains at least 20 cigarettes or cigarillos; secondly, that no manufacturer or retailer shall sell a cigar without a health warning label regardless of the number of cigars being sold; and thirdly, that no manufacturer or retailer shall sell cigarettes or cigarillos

that include a flavouring agent other than sugar, tobacco, or tobacco extracts.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, these measures displayed only very limited effectiveness in achieving their goals. Tobacco companies simply responded by slightly altering their products such that their cigarillos were branded cigars, for example. These and other innovations effectively allowed tobacco manufacturers and distributors to circumvent sale, packaging, and flavour restrictions. Thus, at the federal level the struggle to regulate tobacco has been an arduous battle.

However, Alberta has also tackled the issue here in the province. On January 1, 2008, the Tobacco Reduction Act came into effect. It was an amendment to the Smoke-free Places Act. The goal of this act was to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use within Alberta. To accomplish this goal, the act put into place some restrictions that would gradually be placed on tobacco use over a period of time. The primary target of the Tobacco Reduction Act was the elimination of second-hand smoke in public places. To accomplish this, the act made smoking in public places illegal effective January 1, 2008. Fines ranged between \$1,000 and \$5,000 for individuals and much more for businesses, up to \$100,000 for violators.

4:40

On July 1, 2008, the second phase of the Tobacco Reduction Act came into effect. This phase targeted the advertising of tobacco products. It stated that retailers were no longer allowed to advertise in any way the sale of any tobacco products. This restriction on advertising also included point-of-sale displays such as the wall of cigarettes often seen in corner stores.

The final phase came into effect on January 1, 2009. That phase stipulated that tobacco products may not be sold by pharmacies, health facilities, and postsecondary institutions.

Just recently, Mr. Speaker, in 2012, this Legislature passed the Tobacco Reduction (Protection of Children in Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2012, which banned smoking in vehicles with minors present. This government has pledged to proclaim the act as part of an update to the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy.

The government has also taken legislative action to protect youth specifically, Mr. Speaker. The Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act came into force through proclamation on April 1, 2003. The act was created with the recognition that the Legislature of Alberta has a responsibility to promote the health of young people by restricting their access to tobacco products. In fact, the act states that no person under the age of 18 years may possess or consume tobacco products in a public place. Punishment for violation included a fine of not more than \$100. In addition to the fine placed on the unlawful tobacco user, peace officers may seize the tobacco products.

As we can see, Mr. Speaker, both Canada and Alberta have a long history of working to curb tobacco use and abuse not just in adults but in the populations of youth and minors. Let's carry on that trend. Combined with the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy, we're well on our way towards a future in which smoking tobacco products is on the decline. Ideally, it would be nonexistent.

Thus, I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for sponsoring this bill. It is a good bill. I'm thankful to be able to stand before you and speak to it. I believe that the conversation that we're having today will go down in history as reducing this evil of tobacco to nil for youth.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 206, Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012, being brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East. I would like to thank him for taking on such an admirable cause, especially one that affects the lives of many of our province's youth. I would also like to thank him for sharing his personal story and let him know how touched I am by his words and by the courage of his leadership. As a father of a young family myself, much like the Member for Calgary-South East, I'm very pleased and honoured to stand in support of my hon. friend's bill.

Many of us in the House know about the damaging effects that smoking has on our health, especially the high incidences of cancer-related deaths of millions of people around the world. Smoking-related death is the most preventable type of death in Canada. Smoking is known to cause a multitude of respiratory illnesses and diseases, namely cancer. Mr. Speaker, because of smoking's connections to preventable death and disease, proactive measures have been taken in order to protect the well-being and health of our families and our communities. Legislation has been implemented in order to dissuade tobacco use and promote the health and well-being of our citizens.

It's hard to believe that it was only during the mid-80s that antitobacco legislation first restricted smoking in federally regulated workplaces. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar spoke quite eloquently about, this included planes, trains, and boats with the introduction of bills C-204 and C-51. I think most of us in the Legislature today are old enough to remember the lunacy of the smoking and nonsmoking sections of airplanes.

I cannot imagine going into a public space such as the supermarket, the post office, or a shopping mall and having my lungs unwillingly filled with second-hand smoke. This, Mr. Speaker, is something that I do not take for granted. I'm grateful that the health of our citizens is being protected, and I'm grateful for those who came before us to enact these laws. Overwhelmingly studies have shown that inhaling second-hand smoke has tragic consequences and has proven to be as lethal a killer as actively smoking tobacco itself.

Since the federal government began cracking down on smoking, our province's rate of tobacco use has decreased from 26 per cent to 17.7 per cent of our population, this occurring between 1999 and 2011. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, youth tobacco use among those aged 15 to 19 has also significantly dropped, from 26 per cent to an astonishing 3.3 per cent between 1999 and 2011. As the father of a 15-year-old I'm grateful for this decrease. As the numbers indicate, putting these regulations in place has had a significant effect on the decline of underage smoking in Alberta, in Canada as a whole. Although 3.3 per cent is a drastic change from 26, it is 3.3 per cent too much.

The Tobacco Reduction Act, which became law on January 1, 2008, as an amendment to the Smoke-free Places Act, helps strengthen antitobacco laws. The main objective of this act, Mr. Speaker, was to eliminate the exposure to second-hand smoke in public places and, more importantly, to protect the health of our citizens. The act outlines several provisions regarding smoking and how tobacco products were advertised. Some might take it for granted now, but this act prohibited smoking in all public places and workplaces, and for that, we should all be thankful. The act also banned retail displays, the marketing and promotion of tobacco products, and barred the sale of tobacco products from all health care facilities, public postsecondary campuses, pharmacies, and stores housing pharmacies. Banning smoking in public places meant that nonsmokers no longer had to fear that they were

somehow putting their lives in undue jeopardy because of second-hand smoke exposure.

Mr. Speaker, several tobacco products were specifically targeted in the act. These included cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos, pipe tobacco, and specialty tobacco such as chewing tobacco, snoose, and snuff. Any person who contravenes the act may be subject to fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Businesses that contravene the act face fines ranging from \$10,000 up to \$100,000.

Mr. Speaker, after this act was put in place, you could hear a sigh of relief throughout the province as families could now go to any public place without fear of exposing their young children to the dangerous chemicals contained in second-hand cigarette smoke. More importantly, all nonsmokers could rest assured that their lungs were not unduly being filled with second-hand smoke and that their health was not being threatened. Health Canada estimates that there are at least 800 deaths per year that are related to second-hand smoke. Many of these individuals die from lung cancer and heart disease brought on by second-hand smoke.

There are over 4,000 chemicals contained in tobacco smoke, and more than 70 are known to initiate or promote cancer. Mr. Speaker, these chemicals, known as carcinogens, are agents that increase the risk of cancer. They are widely known to harm one's cardiovascular system as nicotine increases the demand for oxygen by increasing heart rates, making one's heart work harder than normal. Prolonged effects of smoking can lead to stroke, heart disease, and, of course, cancer. Nicotine may also increase the buildup of deposits in the arterial linings, which impairs blood flow.

Mr. Speaker, Health Canada also deduced that the average age most smokers start smoking is 15 and that daily smokers consume an average of 16.2 cigarettes per day. After a lifetime of day-to-day smoking, I cannot even begin to imagine the adverse effects this would have on one's system, let alone the increased risk of heart disease and cancer. Of course, we don't have to imagine since studies have shown time and time again the negative effects that prolonged smoking has on one's body.

In terms of lung cancer related cases Health Canada estimates that there are between 14,500 and 18,200 new cases every year. Alberta Health Services states that over 47,000 people die from smoking every year in Canada, with an estimated 3,400 being Albertans. Furthermore, costs related to smoking-related illness in Canada total around \$4.4 billion. Imagine how many schools and health centres we could build by saving on that money.

4:50

Given that there are so many second-hand smoke related Canadian deaths in any given year as well as billions spent on health care due to smoke-related disease, it makes sense that our province would actively promote decreased tobacco use, particularly amongst our youth. The Tobacco Reduction Act's ban on tobacco displays, for example, has helped reduce the prevalence of tobacco use in teenagers, who may be swayed by manipulative advertisements that glamorize smoking. As a result, Mr. Speaker, fewer of our children will be exposed to and have to experience smoking-related diseases or have their right to live in a smoke-free environment infringed upon.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of Bill 206 is commendable as it may help in the battle against smoking-related diseases, and I am interested in hearing the rest of this debate. Once again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for bringing this bill before the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we now call the motion to close debate and take the vote. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

If there are no other speakers, I'll invite the Member for Calgary-South East to close debate.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's pretty clear, from what we've heard today, that based on the facts, based on the emotion, based on personal experience, smoking is bad. I guess we could put it into terms when I talked about: the aim of this bill was to prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco products in cigarettes, cigarillos, and the smokeless tobacco. Again, I'll reference the Willy Wonka factor. When we talk about *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, we think of a happy time, our kids, and we think about confectionary and candy. We don't think about tobacco. We don't think about the adverse effects. I guess that if Willy Wonka and the Oompa-Loompas were to put it their way, they'd say: oompa oompa, doompadee-doo; I've got some news for you; smoking is bad for you.

I guess, as we move forward, like I said, the evidence is there from a clinical and medical perspective, but it's also there from a social perspective. Again, this has nothing to do with admonishing those people who do smoke. Colleagues and friends and family, we simply wish you would quit because we love you, and for our kids that we held in our arms with their soft skin and their coos and babbles, we want to do everything to protect them from the temptation of something that will not perhaps one day kill them, but it's just a matter of when it will, when they'll get the bad effects of smoking.

Mr. Speaker, in short, it's the right thing to do for all members. We all know – we all know – in this House that we need to ban these products from our kids. I urge every member of this House to vote in favour of this bill, protect our children, and do what's right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the clock I'd move that we call it 5 o'clock and move on to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Enhanced Viability of Rural Communities

511. Ms Kubinec moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to complete a report, to be tabled in the Assembly, which examines various strategies utilized around the world that enhance the viability of rural communities and to help retain rural families.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 511. I am proposing this motion because I believe that communities and families are the lifeblood that sustains rural communities. Motion 511 simply urges the government to explore rural retention initiatives and strategies used in other areas of the world.

To me, exploring options to support rural life means looking at supports and legislative tools for both existing and future possibil-

ities of further innovation. Many rural communities see their youth flock to urban centres, be it for education, employment, or entertainment. Mr. Speaker, this is a troubling trend for many rural families and communities.

I believe that young people can make a fruitful life for themselves and their families in rural Alberta, and we have examples in my own family who have done just that. But there are various obstacles that face other families. The lack of options for child care and concern that children may not receive the same educational or extracurricular opportunities as those in urban centres are recurring themes when I speak to my constituents.

I want to tell you a little bit about the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, which is a shining example of a success story on that education front where they've done amazing work to make sure that education is well taken care of.

Addressing some of these concerns is a recent initiative that has caught my attention. It's called the return to rural. It is a community economic development project aimed at attracting and retaining early- and mid-career families to and in rural Alberta. Their guiding philosophy is the idea that by blending technology and youth, it is possible to create an environment in which rural is a viable choice for youth to live their dream life. Their strategy leverages the Internet, social media, and advances in communication technology to connect, engage, and match young people with the opportunities that are now available in rural Alberta. This is a great initiative, and as a government I think it is our duty to support what such individuals and entrepreneurs are doing to further explore options that can make rural life more viable for young families.

Now, as we will hear from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, this government is already doing a lot to promote and support a sustainable rural Alberta. In no way does this motion assume that good work isn't already being done, but I think we can greatly benefit from broadening our research horizons to include other areas of the world. Australia, for example, has done a lot of work to support its rural communities, and my thought is: why shouldn't we look at Australia to see if there's anything that they are doing successfully that we can do here?

Sharing information is key to the development of best practices. That's why, in the drafting of the Alberta rural development strategy, other jurisdictions were looked at in order to determine how we can best support our rural communities. My understanding, however, is that this interjurisdictional scan was limited to North America. Many strategies and individuals in North America have seen great successes, including in my son's community, where they have successfully developed and implemented a model for a rural child care centre in Manitoba. They identified a need, they knew what they had to do, they worked with the government, they fundraised, and they opened a 24-space child care centre.

I think we are missing out on a great deal if we don't investigate success stories from other areas of the world when crafting legislation and policies to create our own success stories. I believe that by doing this, the government can further contribute to rural retention and sustainability, two things which are very important to my constituents and indeed to many Albertans.

Whatever the outcome here today, the debate and awareness surrounding this motion will be valuable. I hope the debate will help inform current efforts to improve the sustainability and viability of rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this government is already doing much to support rural families and municipalities, but I believe that a government must not stop at trying to improve our province every

day. To solve this issue will require leadership from both the government here in Edmonton and from our municipal government partners. I urge all hon. members to follow this debate with interest and consider fully the advantages of studying potential solutions found in other countries around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder and then Little Bow.

5:00

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise here today, and the Alberta New Democrats certainly are in full support of Motion 511. I would thank the member for bringing it forward. It's very important that we do support our local and rural communities as strongly as possible. There are a number of very difficult problems that you have to deal with through regulation and through guidance from different levels of government. The natural process that we see not just in Alberta but in other provinces around the country and, indeed, around the world is urbanization, right? To mitigate against that, it's important that we do face this problem and work with it actively here in bodies such as this Alberta Legislature.

I think that if we can build a report that can be commissioned to highlight some of the issues that our rural areas are facing today, that would be good. You know, we want to look at areas in particular such as the shortage of doctors and nurses and health care professionals and the time-worn infrastructure of those health services around rural Alberta. At the end of March 2013 we saw there were 8,399 physicians registered – and this was a decrease of only .6 per cent from the last quarter and an increase of 4.7 per cent from last year – and 366 specialists. In the rural areas is where we are seeing movement, considerable negative movement in this area. Studies have shown that doctor shortages impact the economy of rural communities. Physician shortages lead to increased absenteeism for employers and employees that have to look for medical services elsewhere. Doctor shortages, Mr. Speaker, also make it harder for small-town businesses to recruit people.

The government seems to have a strategy to centralize certain medical services to the detriment of rural and smaller centres. We saw the lab testing, for example, go from rural hospitals to larger municipalities, which, again, erodes the jobs and the capacity for smaller centres to look after themselves. Just today we were highlighting that very thing with Wainwright, Westlock, and Vermilion losing their central microbiology and hemoglobin analysis to Edmonton. We can regulate and fight back against these kinds of centralization processes if we choose to do so here in this Legislature.

For example – and this is a perfect one because it's happening here today – if rural hospitals lose that lab capacity, the first problem is that we do put patient safety into compromise, right? We saw it also for other tests in the last few years. For example, the Westlock hospital has an orthopedic surgery and a stroke centre. They do lots of blood tests there, and they do very good work looking for infections after surgery and so forth. Those blood and test fluids are going straight to an incubator, and then they finish them off straight away, often on the same day. These tests are important to many aspects of medical services, and they include letting the doctors know if surgery recipients are suffering from infections and so forth and what can be done, let's say, with a stroke victim, right? So moving those central services to Edmonton not only puts those things in jeopardy but also fights against this idea of making our rural and smaller communities stronger.

Another issue that I just want to bring forward quickly here, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to the loss of family farms here in the province of Alberta. You know, we've lost many jobs in the agricultural sector over the years, and we do see some provinces, in particular Nova Scotia, making an active investment back into promoting family farms since 2009 – indeed, they're the only province that has seen an increase as opposed to losses like everybody else – investing in things like local food campaigns, providing funds for farmers' markets, and extensive supports to new farmers. The Nova Scotia government also set a goal – right? – an active goal of 20 per cent for locally grown food products being bought and sold and eaten by Nova Scotians by 2020. We could use these kinds of best practices from other jurisdictions. The hon. member mentioned Australia. I'm mentioning Nova Scotia for actively promoting local economy growth and, in this case, agriculture in our rural areas.

I think we know that events such as the BSE crisis that we saw were particularly hard on our rural areas, and it's important that we fight back to support our beef producers. For example, when the prices plummeted, we didn't see the money going back into family farms; rather, they tended to be scooped up by corporate agribusinesses. It's really important that we don't let that sort of thing happen again and that we mitigate against losses that can happen in the beef industry but also for other commodities as well, other grain commodities and so forth.

Further, the access to water, I think, is a new concern for people living in rural communities, to good, quality drinking water as well as water for agriculture and industry. As we move to water markets, in some areas we see, you know, the potential for rural development to be sidetracked or to be distorted as some people may get left out in the cold or left high and dry, so to speak, without water permits.

Other things that we need to mitigate against, Mr. Speaker, include free trade deals that we have with other countries. Those are all well and good for certain industries, but it's important that you protect certain indigenous, vital, essential industries, our agriculture products being one of them. Making investments into AgriStability, for example, and AgriInvest are very important. The money has been taken out of those systems and those subsidies, and I'm quite concerned about that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, you know, lots of people are concerned about land rights in Alberta. Bill 24, the Carbon Capture and Storage Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, declared that all pore space under the ground belongs to the government. Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, divides the province into land-use regions but allows as well the cabinet to extinguish existing rights held under licences, permits, leases, and approvals. Finally, Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, was used to force through transmission infrastructure to the detriment of individual landowners. Again, these are sort of cumulative things that make it more difficult for the integrity of rural development to proceed in a reasonable sort of way.

I think we just need to allow more control to regions to make their decisions over important things such as health care and education, for municipalities to have greater autonomy in their ability to develop their municipal areas and expand as they see fit, expanding health care clinics and attracting professionals to the rural areas, working with rural school boards to attract teachers, making sure that we have access to high-speed Internet throughout the rural areas, increasing and expanding and ensuring bus service to rural communities, Mr. Speaker, improving the monitoring and management of our watersheds, and ensuring that everyone has access to good, quality water for their own domestic consumption and for agriculture and industry.

I think a buy-Alberta-local initiative would help considerably, making sure that we stand up for individual farmers' rights in regard to their ability to sell their products, particularly seed, not extinguishing property rights without fair compensation, as I said before, and protecting Alberta's farmland to ensure continued accessibility to Albertan families to promote and to pursue agriculture, especially in the immediate vicinity of rural areas.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to support this motion and to speak on these issues. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. minister of agriculture.

5:10

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand up today and speak to Motion 511. I think the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock has brought forward a very good motion here for the government to work on to promote rural Alberta. Being an MLA from a rural riding and an active farmer myself, I think it's key to keep rural Alberta thriving, and it's a key point to how this province is going to maintain where it's at and how to move forward. The Member for Edmonton-Calder brought up a couple of good things which I had later on in my speech here.

I think some of the key things we need to remember are rural jobs, rural growth, and economic security. I think that's needed in this province to be able to move forward. As we've identified with the bitumen bubble and energy, Alberta is very reliant on our income off Alberta energy, being oil and gas, and we need to look at the other large renewable resource we have in this province, which is agriculture. Now, of course, I'm a pretty strong advocate of that, and I'm always happy to see that our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is also a strong advocate of that and has promoted it through numerous things. I always give kudos where they're due.

One of the positives I saw during constituency week. I was in Vauxhall at the graduation of the school there, and I think there were about 50 to 60 kids that graduated. Now, when I graduated from high school, I was going to farm. My dad had a stroke when I was 17, and I knew through grade 12 that I was going to take over the family farm, so I knew naturally that I was going to farm. There was not another soul in High River at Senator Riley school out of the 120 kids that graduated that said that they were interested in agriculture and were going to go on to it.

Now, when I was in Vauxhall at the end of the constituency week, about 25 per cent of the kids got up and talked about how they were going to go to school in an agriculture-related thing and that their plan after three years was to return to the family farm. I was just glowing after that because you never hear that when you go to a school anymore. We have so many years of kids – you heard parents talk about it. "We're going to get our kids educated and get them off this farm so they can go make a real living." I think now people have started to figure out, you know, that we have to feed the world. Numerous things I've been to: we're going to have 9 billion people to feed by 2050. That goes back to agriculture in rural Alberta and how we have to keep rural communities vibrant and sustainable. So to be glowing about that was an understatement.

I'm very happy. My stepson is 18, and he has rented a half section this year. Last year he rented a quarter, and this year he's rented a half, so he's involved in agriculture. He grew up in an urban situation. He had no desire, but you have to show them that

there's a possibility and teach them the bonuses of being in rural Alberta.

So to me, when I was in Vauxhall, that was just an absolute great moment in my life, to sit there and listen to kids talk about how they want to be part of rural Alberta and move back. They want to go to school in the urban centres, whether it be Lethbridge or Calgary or Edmonton, and get their basis, their college or university. And it's needed because it's a business now. Agriculture used to be, you know, that if you pail fed 200 head of cows, you could kind of get yourself out of any problem in the winter. That's probably why a lot of kids decided they didn't want to farm. It was because of all the hard manual labour to it. Being an active farmer is a lot more book smarts now. You can make more money by hedging and things like that as far as marketing and managing.

Mr. Hale: Triple-A farming.

Mr. Donovan: Yeah, triple-A farming. It's not quite that easy, Member for Strathmore-Brooks, but it's very close.

I think one of the big things – and Edmonton-Calder touched on it – is rural doctor retention, to keep rural doctors in our hospitals. Now, I was lucky enough, when I was on county council, to be on the retention committee for that. That's a key thing because when people look to retire or age in place, they're looking at towns to see: are they going to be able to have all the facilities they need there? If you don't have the doctors staying around for that, you've got a huge problem because it's hard to age in place if you're not going to be able to get the care and level of care that you need.

I think that's something that this province has to work on. I know they've struck a committee on a couple of things that they need to identify on that. I think that's something we really need to push, and I'd promote for our Health minister to look at how we keep doctors in rural Alberta. We have so many people now that are going through medical school and want to be a specialist on knees, hips, elbows – pick your item – cardiologists, but nobody wants to be a family physician anymore, and that's something that we truly need. We need family physicians. How are we going to encourage them to stay in rural Alberta?

Now, one of the things I find is that when people get out there – the two family doctors I know in Vulcan, for instance, I don't think ever planned on making Vulcan their home for life and raising their kids there, but once they got out there and found the small-town values, that it was a nice place to raise your kids and it had a lot of bonuses, then they became comfortable in staying there. Now they promote it, and they're very strong advocates. I appreciate that both of the doctors have been there for a number of years.

Things have changed a little bit on that because not everybody wants to be a doctor till they're 85 like it once used to be in the small towns. I mean, you always had your doctor. He was the doctor when you were born and when your parents were born. You start wondering if, you know, they're keeping up on everything. But I think doctor retention is key.

One of the things that I think we need to look forward on is the fact of aging in place. Now, I got christened last summer with a closure in Carmangay, which I think everybody in here heard about. If you didn't, I can give you a quick refresher on it. That's one of the things we had on aging in place and what kept rural Alberta vibrant.

Now, through the FOIP process, which the Deputy Premier talked of earlier today during question period and how well we use it as opposition – I almost wish I hadn't FOIPed that whole thing

because I was a little bit sick after reading it, about how AHS knew the deadlines, knew the dates they were closing the facility, and that they put in there, through the FOIP information that we got: don't let that out, whatever you do; they don't need to know we're closing that in September. They actually went along, and it seemed like there was a whole process of: "Oh, we truly do care. We're going to come in and see what's wrong with that facility. Maybe there's a problem with it." And they knew right at the beginning that they were going to close it. I'm a pretty honest person. If you don't want to keep a place open, just say: "It's closing September 10. Get over it, and move on."

We put on tons of miles. We did tons of tours. But, I mean, the beauty of FOIP is that we got to sit there and go through it and find out that it was known right at the beginning when their closing date was. There were memos that were sent around in AHS saying: "Make sure you don't put the date on it. We don't need that date on there. They're really going to fight once they know that there's a drop-dead date to it." We went around and heard from the Minister of Health at the time that there was no deadline. There's no deadline. Now, whether he wasn't privy to the information that was going around AHS, I don't know, but we're now finding out the facts afterwards.

I guess it goes back to rural Alberta and how to keep things going. Let the aging-in-place facilities still be there. That was pretty disheartening to see.

Now I'd like to move forward from that as it's gone now. So how to move forward. I think we've got to sit here and touch on the great things we have in rural Alberta. We have great schools. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock brought up about distance learning and stuff like that. That's key. We talked about Australia. I was lucky that in previous years, before I was married and had any kids, I went to Australia for six weeks and toured around. One of the big things they have in Australia is distance learning. Kids stay at home. There are vast areas out there. For one family at the one cattle station their driveway was 35 miles. Nobody else lived out there. Their driveway was 35 miles. I mean, you sit and put that in perspective, how scarce the population is in some of the rural areas. But the reason they keep functioning and keep going is because they supply the distance learning out there. It's key, and it works.

That's something I had hoped that we could keep on in Alberta, the education in rural schools. You know, there are some colleagues from different parties who touch on whether they should be private or public or what we do from there, and that's a different debate for a different day. But I think the key is that we've got to keep focusing on rural jobs, rural growth, and rural security. Security ties back into knowing that you have hospitals, knowing that you have good education, and knowing that you have businesses that can thrive in your smaller communities.

Like most families when they move to an urban centre, one of the things they look at is recreation. I've been a strong advocate for that. Now, how to juggle it all is always a challenge, how to keep recreation plausible and financially secure in the smaller centres so that people have all of those things.

High-speed Internet is one thing. I mean, I'll give the government credit for over the years putting in the high-speed Internet line and that to all of the communities. That's been key. People have been able to keep up. I think everybody in here had snail mail, going over the telephone lines with Internet then. You were pretty happy if you could download something in a half-hour or 45 minutes. I remember that you used to sit and click, and you'd walk away and, you know, half hour, an hour later – poof – your file was there, and you thought: "Wow. This is technology. Look how fast this stuff moves." I mean, now if we don't get

something downloaded on our phone in five seconds, we're a little chippy.

But I'm in support of this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

5:20

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to say a few words today regarding Motion 511, which urges the government to complete a report that examines various strategies used around the world to enhance the viability of rural communities and to help retain rural families. I want to, first of all, though, thank the hon. member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock for bringing this matter forward. I feel that we don't often enough speak about issues relating to rural Alberta and agriculture, so I want to thank her for creating this platform, this opportunity for us to have a discussion.

Like her, I'm from rural Alberta as many members here are, and we are passionate about issues relating to rural Alberta. When I was first appointed, about a year ago, to this ministry, the Premier gave me a mandate which included raising the profile of agriculture and rural Alberta. I fairly quickly realized that this is not the type of thing that any one government department can do because it involves so many aspects of a person's life, as has already been mentioned by some of the hon. members: health care, transportation, tourism, municipal affairs, education, and so on. It really does take a broad, government-wide approach, I think, to move the yardsticks, and that's certainly what we're about here.

I want to speak a little bit about the importance of rural Alberta and the rural Alberta economy to the province. There was a report issued by the Conference Board of Canada in 2012, so just recently, talking about the economic footprint of the rural Alberta economy. The numbers are very impressive. It's a \$79 billion a year impact, the rural economy, to this province. That includes \$1.3 billion in provincial tax. So it's very important for us.

We continue as a government and in my department to invest in initiatives that support rural communities. I am going to take a few minutes to talk about some of them because I think it bears repeating. There may be some things that not everybody knows about. There are the obvious things, the obvious grassroots supports to things like ag societies and also agricultural service boards, who provide support for agriculture around the province and to rural municipalities. In terms of the ag societies we have 294 agricultural societies; 284 of them are what we call primary, or local, ag societies. So that's the smaller ag societies. Then we have the regionals, which include those in some of the medium-sized cities around the province or at least centred there. Then we have the two large ag societies, Edmonton Northlands and the Calgary Stampede.

All of these organizations are very strongly driven by volunteers. If it were not for those volunteers, the activities of these societies would be greatly, greatly curtailed. They provide support for important events in communities, everything from rodeos and things like that to farm safety seminars and everything in between. They also provide great infrastructure support. They manage and maintain community halls, curling rinks, hockey rinks, and the types of facilities you see in rural communities that are multi-use facilities. We talk a lot these days about infrastructure and the importance of multi-use facilities. Well, community halls get used for everything that happens in a community, including provincial elections, federal elections, even in some

cases, I would suggest, church meetings, and anything that is of importance to people in that community.

We also have a program called the agricultural initiatives program in my department that supports infrastructure and activities. It's a grant program that we're very proud of and that has done great work, is of great assistance in communities. I can think of a couple of recent examples just kind of off the top of my head. A week or two ago I was in Medicine Hat and was able to present a cheque to the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede for \$73,800. What's interesting is the variety of things that that money was going to be used for, everything from a new waterline to graveling the parking lot to equipment in the kitchen. On that same trip when I was down there, I was able to present the Duchess Ag Society with a cheque for \$75,000 for their new ice plant.

The hon. Member for Little Bow mentioned that we also support rural utilities, and I am proud to say that we have been supporting and continue to support gas co-ops, rural electrification co-ops. We also have been supporting the final mile rural community program, which is creating Internet infrastructure around the province and in remote areas of the province. That's very important because it has been quite properly pointed out by other speakers that for rural Alberta to be on an even playing field with the urban areas and with other parts of the world, they need to have access. They need to have the ability to communicate, as everybody else does, by Internet. It could be farmers checking out crop prices and weather reports. There are all kinds of uses that this infrastructure is good for in terms of a rural economy.

A few weeks ago I was up in DeBolt at the 40th anniversary of the East Smoky Gas Co-op. One of the very interesting things I learned there, besides, again, the great volunteer support that has made that co-op successful, was the story about the entrepreneurial spirit of those people in terms of creating Internet capacity and coupling it with the activities of the gas co-op, piggybacking one on the other and really bringing some much-needed capacity to their community.

We also have made a major investment in rural Alberta and rural Alberta development by way of the rural Alberta development fund. Now, I know that this motion is about doing a study. Studies have happened before. There's been lots of discussion about how we do rural development, how we support rural Alberta. The rural Alberta development fund was created in 2006 and that flowed out of a previous report. The fund was an investment of \$100 million that went into 85 different projects. The idea of that fund was to identify creative projects that could serve as good examples for other communities so that people across the province could benefit from innovative initiatives.

I want to give just a couple of examples of some of the interesting things that were done arising out of that. One that's very immediate for us and one of the most recent grants out of that program is the \$3.5 million that is going to the Alberta Peloton Association for the upcoming tour of Alberta, which a lot of us have been hearing about. It's going to happen September 3 to 8. Now, this is something that is going to create world-wide attention for Alberta. It's a wonderful opportunity for us to showcase what we have here in Alberta, and in rural Alberta it's going to create economic development. It's certainly a wonderful tourism tool, and it's also encouraging wellness just by way of the physical activity in the sport that we are showcasing. Coupled with that, I know our Ministry of Culture has also been working very hard to make sure it's a festival so that communities celebrate the event as it passes through their area.

Another initiative that flows out of the rural Alberta development fund is the \$970,000 which was awarded several years ago to the FarmOn Foundation from Bashaw, which is not

too far from where I live. These are innovative people who are focused on young farmers and people who need help with ideas as to how they can get into the business. It involves social learning. It involves web learning. Their website address is farmon.com. [Mr. Olson's speaking time expired.] I have so much more. I'm sorry.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and support the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and the motion that she's brought forward about rural communities and the importance and viability of them. I just want to comment on the remarks from the minister of agriculture about other reports being done. You know, we have done other reports. This is important, but I think it's also important that we do do some action.

Mr. Speaker, you know, Alberta is a pretty diverse province, and a strong economy is presenting many challenges for rural Alberta communities. I want to talk a little bit about West Yellowhead. I want to talk a little bit about the north, and I want to talk a little bit about aboriginal communities and how they tie into the rural landscape.

In West Yellowhead the attraction and retention of professionals like lawyers, accountants, and doctors is proving to be difficult. While the professionals may like the community, their families prefer larger centres, where there are more options for things like shopping, culture, and recreation. Mr. Speaker, I can speak personally to that because my family doctor came to Hinton, stayed for about a year and a half, and his wife said, "We just can't live there anymore," and they got up, and they left and left me without a doctor.

Mrs. McQueen: Was it you?

Mr. Campbell: It wasn't me. It was the fact that there were no piano lessons.

In one community in my constituency there is a huge demand for lawyers but only a few practising. Again, in fact, one lawyer who was recently practising had so much demand for his services he often worked seven days a week, leaving no time for his family. He ended up leaving the job for a larger centre to allow him some time with his family and a more balanced lifestyle. This is creating even more demand on those that remain in the community, and the same challenges occur with our doctors and our other professionals. I can say, Mr. Speaker, that in the town of Hinton two doctors, Dr. Caffaro and Dr. Armstrong, are two very competent individuals who lead the rural strategy for doctors in this province and do a very good job and actually bring a lot of young people into my riding, and some of them actually stay, which is great for the people there.

In West Yellowhead, you know, housing is an important issue. Again, in a lot of rural communities demand for rental units throughout the province is causing some concerns. In my riding, where the communities are doing quite well and the forest industry, coal mining, oil, and gas are all doing very well, rates are anywhere from a thousand to \$1,600 a month and basically zero vacancy. In West Yellowhead, Mr. Speaker, we actually put up four affordable housing projects in the last four years, I think to the tune of about 180 units. We still have a waiting list for those.

Even though our government has provided approximately \$1 billion to create 22,000 affordable housing spaces and actually used that money to work with industry to create even more money to provide more housing spaces, it's still creating some real issues

for us, and it's really difficult for families to find affordable housing within our rising economy, especially out in rural Alberta. So as we try to attract young professionals, when they come into Hinton, for example, or Edson, there's just no place for them to live. All of the communities suffer because of that.

Mr. Speaker, rural communities face some very significant challenges in our growing economy, and of course in my riding our communities all face similar issues dealing with growth and increased infrastructure demands. We need to look at best practices and ideas from other jurisdictions so we can continue to build on our successes.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about aboriginal issues as it relates to Alberta's rural development. As chair of the NADC for four years, you know, it was hard to differentiate between aboriginal and nonaboriginal people as we looked at the challenges that are faced in the north.

I just want to bring up some excerpts from the 2010 progress report from Alberta's rural development strategy. They talked about strategic partnerships between aboriginal organizations, industry, and governments to enhance aboriginal participation in the economy. Again, you could just use any word. Instead of aboriginal groups you could just talk about people.

Aboriginal Economic Partnerships provide Aboriginal communities and organizations with funding and advisory support to build capacity leading to employment and business development opportunities in the Alberta economy.

Providing... [funding] for capacity development... improving educational attainment and employment opportunities...

For example, we do that with the six Métis nations regions, which cover large areas of rural parts of the province, especially the north.

Develop an Aboriginal Wellness Strategy that outlines activities and initiatives to improve the health status and well-being of Aboriginal people...

Promote Aboriginal heritage by collaborating with communities on heritage preservation and renewing exhibits.

Again, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is an example.

Mr. Speaker, looking at mobile diabetes screening initiatives, making sure that people within northern communities have the ability to have themselves tested through

portable testing equipment to screen for diabetes and its complications. The team also does health promotion/diabetes education... where possible [and] encourages linkages with local health care providers. To date, 25 unique communities have been visited... many of them a number of times...

Through the Learning Clicks Program, ambassadors visit rural junior and senior high schools and communities across the province to motivate both youth and adults to pursue further education and training and to assist potential learners in how to navigate the Campus Alberta system. The program has developed unique strategies in partnership with community leaders to engage Aboriginal students on and off reserve...

Numerous supports for teachers to northern Alberta are available. They include the Supporting Beginning Teachers Program.

I know that through the NADC we've set up the northern teachers' bursary program, where we pay for the third and fourth years for northern students to get their degree and then go and practise in the north for a period of time, and that's worked very well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to leave you with some excerpts from Alberta's rural development strategy 2005 report, A Place to Grow. The following actions were to be taken on a priority basis to begin implementation of this comprehensive new strategy for rural Alberta. The objectives were to

Ensure that Aboriginal Albertans participate fully in rural development opportunities across the province.

Some of the priority actions were to

Facilitate strengthened relationships [between] Aboriginal, federal, provincial and local governments, industry and other interested parties to enhance the participation of Aboriginal people in the continuing development of rural economies and communities.

Fully implement the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework developed jointly by Aboriginal people and the provincial government...

Expand opportunities for Aboriginal youth to become involved in 4H programs designed and adapted specifically for aboriginal youth.

Implement the First Nations Training to Employment Partnership program.

Develop and implement a First Nations Economic Participation Strategy.

Work on priority actions identified in this new Rural Development Strategy will begin immediately. In future years, the provincial government will rely on the advice provided through the new Rural Citizens' Voice to adapt and modify the strategy to meet changing needs.

Mr. Speaker, I think this last comment says it all.

A Place to Grow is not designed to be the solution to every challenge in rural Alberta but to act as a catalyst for action in communities across the province – actions that will sustain a rural way of life that was vital to our past and is just as vital to the future of our province.

I think the member's motion sums that up, and I'm more than happy to support her on her motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat has a large rural component, so I rise to speak briefly to Motion 511, which urges "the government to complete a report, to be tabled in the Assembly, which examines various strategies utilized around the world that enhance the viability of rural communities and to help retain rural families."

It is a fact of life that many Albertans move from rural areas to urban areas and tend to stay there. Anything that can be done to enhance the viability of rural communities, to help people remain in their rural community is certainly worth looking at.

Another fact of life is that this government says one thing and does another. They have not yet learned that their actions speak louder than words. The words in this motion sound great. Who would not support examining different strategies that would enhance the viability of our rural communities? But I want to take a few minutes to take a look at the actions of this government and how these actions have impacted our rural communities. I do so because I believe a strong provincial and rural economy is based on property rights, stable electricity costs, and a minimum of government interference. Repealing bills 36, 24, and 19, as others have mentioned, would be a great place to start. The illogical idea of high capital investment in these industries and uncertain property rights is no doubt going to lead to more problems in the rural area.

Also, in the last election the Premier promised stable, predictable funding of a 2 per cent yearly increase to school boards, but the action taken in the budget was to significantly reduce funding for education. Recent budgets have decreased funding to Prairie Rose school division in my constituency by an incredible approximately \$2.8 million. This type of severe funding cut to the front

line of education makes it extremely difficult, especially in rural areas. In fact, in the past five years Prairie Rose school division has had to close five schools, rural schools, a very difficult problem, especially where you need some for growth. The government talks about the importance of rural education, but again look at the action taken in the budget: nothing – nothing – to help rural schools, everything to make their job a lot harder. The hardest hit will be the students in the rural areas.

5:40

Our province is desperately short of family doctors – and again this is even more prevalent in rural communities – yet at the same time spaces at the U of C medical school recently dropped to 155 for new entrants, the lowest in five years. This is going to contribute significantly to the shortage we already have – how could it not? – at a time when the province is growing. What actions did the government take? They've been in an all-out war with Alberta's physicians, and the budget also significantly reduced funding to postsecondary institutions.

No one in my constituency has forgotten about Bill 50, the legislation that gave cabinet the power to say that transmission lines were critical infrastructure without a public needs assessment. As a result, Albertans are paying billions for four transmission lines when there's no proof that these lines are needed. The Bill 50 lines will raise the costs of electric bills for every Albertan, and in rural areas, where costs are higher, it is rural Albertans who will be hit the hardest.

Infrastructure that's actually critical infrastructure such as roads is another area in which the government is failing rural Albertans. Albertans don't know what rhyme or reason the government uses to determine which projects to undertake. In Cypress-Medicine Hat the government announced that 40 kilometres of highway 61 would be reworked, repaved, and widened. Twenty kilometres of that work was completed, and the work stopped with no explanation. The project was deleted, dropped from Alberta Transportation's tentative project list. This is an important roadway in our area and a dangerous road. Again, actions speak louder than words. The government promised 40 kilometres of maintenance; work was only done on 20. People take notice of that, Mr. Speaker. In a commodity-based province the ability to move our grain, livestock, oil, gas, and timber around safely and efficiently is paramount.

Many of my rural constituents have also expressed frustration with the government's AgriStability program. The administrative red tape for this program is overwhelming, the forms are unclear, and many people actually have to spend more on professional fees to navigate the program than they receive from the program. Huge improvements can be made here.

If Motion 511 passes and the government does in fact complete a report about strategies in other parts of the world that might work for rural Alberta, I urge the government not to sit on the report and to release the report to the Legislature within 30 days of the completion of the study. I also hope but will not cross my fingers that the government will not spend thousands of taxpayer dollars on outside consultations for such a report when there are qualified people already within the public sector who would better perform this task. Better yet, just go have a real consultation with rural Albertans and ask them what they would think.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and talk about Motion 511. I do agree that we need to continue to look at ways to make rural Alberta viable, sustainable. I think the best thing is that instead of looking around the world, we need to continue to look at home. You know, we have some very, very great entrepreneurs in our own backyards, people that are trying to improve the sustainability and viability of rural Alberta. I find it funny that the government is putting this motion forward to get this study going when, on the other hand, they're taking so much away from rural Alberta.

A great example of that is the pharmacies. Since they came out with this pharmacy plan, I've had over a dozen rural pharmacists come to me and say: "We may have to shut our doors. We will not be able to keep the staff we have." They're going to lay people off. This is coming from the pharmacists. I'm not making any of this up. You've heard day after day after day in question period that we're being contacted by pharmacists that are in trouble and going to be in trouble. That's a fact.

You know, the doctors in our rural communities: it's tough to get doctors to stay. We don't have as much to offer as a big city. It's totally different living in a rural community. The people that live in these communities do great work, and they do great things to keep these doctors and the nurses and the health care staff, but it's tough when we see Carmangay closing and in Strathmore they're closing 25 beds in the hospital. That community has grown. From when that hospital was built, in 1985 – I think they had about 3,500 people there – it's grown to over 13,000 and, then, even more if you count all the rural areas around it. The hospital is getting cut in half. You know, the lab is the same size as when it started, but the population has drastically increased.

They need more doctors in Strathmore, they need more doctors in Bassano, and they need more doctors in Brooks. It's getting tougher and tougher to attract these doctors. I got a letter from a doctor in Brooks that came from South Africa. He said that he has colleagues that would like to come over, but with the contracts and the workloads and everything that they have to go through, why would he want to come to a rural hospital when he can go to a big-city hospital and pick his shifts and live his life?

We had a doctor from South Africa come in, our doctor in Bassano, a good friend of mine. You know, he stayed there for I think it was a couple of years, and he's actually given his notice. As of July 1 he's leaving. So now we're going to have one doctor on staff in Bassano. He's going to have to cover the whole hospital now by himself. I mean, we have to keep working with associations like RPAP, you know, whatever we can do to get these doctors and professionals we need to continue to do it.

Another huge issue in rural Alberta is the pheasant release program. We heard that from Red Deer-North. She put forward petitions. We had the pheasant hatchery in Brooks. It turned out thousands of pheasants a year. They're not the exact figures, but there was a study done, and it was about \$3 million that that pheasant release program brought into southern Alberta, about \$10 million provincially. Now they're looking at getting the birds from out of the country, from the States.

We talk about rural sustainability and things we can do to improve rural Alberta, yet we're cutting things, programs that actually bring money in and keep it viable. You know, that's an issue that needs to be looked at. What can we do, what do we need to do to grow our own pheasants and get all these hunters to come up from out of province and out of the country and bring money into our communities?

Agriculture is a huge, huge part of rural Alberta, and as the Member for Little Bow mentioned, our population is increasing. We're going to have to continue to produce more food, and it's

getting tougher with the property rights laws that came in. Why should someone who has been on that land for that many years have to take direction from a government? They know how to run it. They know how to do everything better than the people up here telling them how to do it.

There are some very, very good examples of programs that are going on to improve attraction to rural Alberta. A very good example is our Bassano school. At the end of January they were the first school in Canada to implement the health, recreation, and human services program using a high-fidelity patient simulator, the first high school in Canada to do this. This is going to allow community partners through the hospital to come in and start showing these children, our students, how the medical industry works. You know, they can work on a simulated patient that does everything that a live person will do. That's a great thing to attract students into the medical profession. It's a great tool for the community to use. Newell Further Ed is an adult education association in town that helps educate adults. You know, they put on courses in first aid, CPR. Those different courses will be able to use the simulator, so that's a great attraction.

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I would now invite the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to close debate on Motion 511.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of Motion 511 is to promote rural retention and sustainability in Alberta. We've heard here today that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has spearheaded a lot of work in this regard already – I wish he could have finished telling us all the wonderful things that have gone on already – but my constituents are still concerned

and want us to broaden our research horizons by looking into what other countries are doing to promote rural regions.

I know that in my own community of Westlock there's a lot of concern right now with the discussion of the removal of some lab services. We are concerned because it will affect jobs in our community. Families have been attracted to Westlock because of the amazing reputation of our hospital. Our RPAP committee recently put on a skills competition day for lab, medical, and physio students to come to see what we have to offer in Westlock, in rural Alberta. The students were very, very impressed with what they saw.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 511 simply urges the government to explore the various strategies used around the world that enhance the viability of rural communities. I value and respect my colleagues' comments regarding this motion, particularly my colleague from Little Bow. In our family we could see that our sons wanted to farm quite early on. We implemented what we called the four-year rule. "You have to go away for four years. You can come back and work in the summer. There might be an opportunity for you when you come back if you choose to." They all went away, and they got engineering degrees, an ag degree. One went to Olds College. They are all now proud farmers who are making a living at doing that job.

I would like to thank everyone who participated on this motion today and urge all members to vote in support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 511 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was slow to rise because I thought people might want to have a standing vote there.

Seeing the hour, I would move that we adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Prayers	2285
Introduction of Guests	2285, 2295
Members' Statements	
Thank-you Letter from MD of Lesser Slave River	2286
Generic Drug Pricing	2286
County of Grande Prairie Sports Complex	2287
Fort McMurray Field Trip by Garneau Students	2287
Skills Canada Alberta Competition	2296
Asian Heritage Month	2296
Oral Question Period	
Health Facilities Infrastructure	2287
Restructuring of PDD Services	2288, 2294
Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff	2288
Bathing Protocols for Persons in Care	2290
Market Access for Alberta Products	2290
Postsecondary Education Program Eliminations	2291
Road Construction Safety	2291
All-terrain Vehicle Safety	2292
Aboriginal Consultations	2292
Generic Drug Pricing	2293
Inquiries into Violation of Legislation	2293
Nordegg Wildfire	2294
Postsecondary Institutions Land-use Regulation	2294
Farmers' Markets	2295
Presenting Petitions	2296
Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees	2297
Notices of Motions	2297
Tabling Returns and Reports	2297
Tablings to the Clerk	2298
Orders of the Day	2298
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Committee of the Whole	
Bill 203 Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012	2298
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Third Reading	
Bill 203 Employment Standards (Compassionate Care Leave) Amendment Act, 2012	2303
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 206 Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012	2303
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Enhanced Viability of Rural Communities	2312

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