



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 14, 2013

Issue 58a

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
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Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
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Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
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Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
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Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
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Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)
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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)
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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
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Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
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Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
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Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
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Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC),
 Government Whip

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 61

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery
Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

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| Cao | Pastoor |
| Donovan | Quadri |
| Dorward | Rogers |
| Eggen | Rowe |
| Hehr | Sarich |
| Luan | Strankman |
| McDonald | Xiao |

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Khan
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

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| Anderson |
| Casey |
| Dorward |
| Eggen |
| Kubinec |
| Sandhu |
| Sherman |

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers
Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

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| Blakeman | Leskiw |
| Eggen | McDonald |
| Goudreau | Saskiw |
| Lemke | |

Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee

Chair: Mr. Allen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Luan

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| Blakeman | Notley |
| Dorward | Saskiw |
| Fenske | Wilson |
| Johnson, L. | Young |
| McDonald | |

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Mr. Quest
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

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| Brown | Jeneroux |
| Cusanelli | Leskiw |
| DeLong | Notley |
| Fraser | Pedersen |
| Fritz | Swann |
| Goudreau | Towle |
| Jablonski | Wilson |
| Jansen | Young |

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Cao
Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

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| Bikman | Leskiw |
| Blakeman | Quadri |
| Brown | Rogers |
| DeLong | Wilson |
| Eggen | |

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

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| Casey | Mason |
| Forsyth | McDonald |
| Fraser | Quest |
| Kennedy-Glans | Sherman |
| Glans | Smith |

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao
Deputy Chair: Ms L. Johnson

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| Barnes | Jablonski |
| Bhardwaj | Leskiw |
| Brown | Notley |
| Cusanelli | Olesen |
| DeLong | Rowe |
| Fox | Strankman |
| Fritz | Swann |
| Goudreau | Webber |

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Olesen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lemke

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| Cao | Notley |
| Casey | Pedersen |
| Hehr | Rogers |
| Jansen | Sandhu |
| Kennedy-Glans | Saskiw |
| Kubinec | Towle |
| Luan | Young |

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

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| Allen | Hehr |
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| Fenske | Quest |
| Goudreau | Sarich |
| Hale | Stier |

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kennedy-Glans
Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

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| Allen | Hale |
| Barnes | Johnson, L. |
| Bikman | Khan |
| Bilous | Kubinec |
| Blakeman | Lemke |
| Calahasen | Sandhu |
| Casey | Stier |
| Fenske | Webber |

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 14, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Dear Lord, help us to find the strength we need to fulfill our many duties unto those who gave us the privilege to serve them, and help us to be ever so humble in that service. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very, very proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two individuals seated in your Speaker's gallery. The first is my dad, my father. Yup, my dad, Dr. Neil Webber, and he's from Calgary. My dad is the past MLA for Calgary-Bow and a past Alberta cabinet minister here in the province, serving for 15 years right here in the Assembly. He served under the leaderships of Premier Peter Lougheed and Premier Donald Getty. His numerous cabinet portfolios included associate minister of telephones and utilities, minister of social services, Minister of Education, and Minister of Energy. He is currently founder and president of Webber Academy.

Accompanying my father, Mr. Speaker, is my sister Barbara, also from Calgary. I'd ask that she stand. She is a retired 27-year undercover police officer and sergeant here at the Edmonton Police Service and in B.C. at the Saanich Police Department.

Both my father and my sister have been such a huge influence on my life, Mr. Speaker, and I'm truly blessed to have such wonderful role models. I'd ask that they both stand one more time and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us carry on with school groups, starting with Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 175 grade 9 students from St. Jean Brebeuf junior high school in the Brentwood community in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Accompanying this group are several teachers and parents: Ms Allison McDougall, Kaitlin Van Geel, Marie Sondergaard, Kerry Higgins, Kyle Hagan, Sara Paisley, Alex Ball, Lisa Varner. The parents include Marc Verones, Cheri Gray, Lili Bunce, Rita Thibodeau, Delia Dasilva, Antonia Lanza, and Karen O'Connor. I invite all the students, their teachers, and parents to rise so that we can respect and honour them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, let us move on. The hon. Premier.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today three of the 14 participants in the 2013 Alberta student ministerial internship program. These particular interns have been assigned within my office here at the Legislature, and I'm delighted to have them in the House

today. First, I'd like to introduce Marc LeBlanc. Marc will be working in my communications office over the summer. He graduated from the Waterloo School of Planning in 2011 and last year served as executive director of the U of A food bank. This fall Marc will begin his master's of science in local economic development at the London School of Economics. He brings with him an array of international work experience in just the last couple of years, following placements across Canada, the United States, France, and Belgium.

Next, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce Hamreet Sekhon. Hamreet will be working in my office, assisting with day-to-day operations and policy development. She graduated from the University of Lethbridge's public health promotion and policy program in 2013 and has described as one of her most rewarding and humbling experiences when she participated in a four-week global field study in Malawi that centred on both HIV and malaria prevention for youth living in rural and urban areas across Malawi. Today is Hamreet's birthday.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce Katherine Perron. Katherine will be spending the summer working in my tours and scheduling unit. She is currently attending the University of Alberta as a third-year international business student, focusing on European studies and the French language. Katherine ultimately hopes to develop her career in the field of international government relations.

I'm thrilled to welcome these interns to the Legislature today. I hope that their summer will be both educational and productive and that they will be able to have particular exposure to political dialogue and to the executive branch of our government. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to introduce to you and through you to members of our House a young man who will be a very important part of my team in my office. Dylan Hanwell is a political science student at the University of Alberta and will be entering his third year of political science. He is originally from Pigeon Lake and came to Edmonton two years ago. Dylan is involved in student governance at the University of Alberta. For the summer Dylan will be working as an intern in my office. He will have the opportunity to learn more about Alberta's postsecondary education system and how government supports it and about the opportunities that present themselves in Campus Alberta. Please join me in welcoming Dylan to our House.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you some remarkable members of Alberta's First Nations. They've come here today to watch us deal with serious and important matters regarding constitutionally required aboriginal consultations. I'll call their names, and as they rise, I would ask all members to give them the traditional warm greetings of this House. Please bear with me. I've got 22 names to introduce: Brian Lee, who is the acting chief of Ermineskin tribe; along with Daniel Wildcat; Dennis Whitebear; Sam Minde, who is also with the Ermineskin tribe; Bob Small with the Treaty 6 Confederacy; Regional Chief Cameron Alexis, Treaty 6 Confederacy; Chief Casey Bird, Paul First Nation; Chief James Jackson, Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake First Nation; Rob Houle, with the Treaty 6 Confederacy; Marilyn Buffalo, Samson Cree Nation; Kevin Ahkimmachie; as well as Freida Cardinal and Victor Horseman

from Treaty 8. We also have Chief Rose Laboucan from Driftpile First Nation; Herb Arcand from Alexander First Nation; Phyllis Whitford from the O'Chiese First Nation; Chief Brad Rabbit from Montana First Nation; Chief Russell Threefingers from the Louis Bull Tribe; as well as Josh Alexis, Caroline O'Driscoll, Edwin Paul, and Lorraine White. Thank you so much for being here. Please give them the warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the House my friend and constituent from Edmonton-Whitemud, Barb Esdale. Barb is the co-chair of Alberta Donates Life Coalition, a group of several health organizations and individual advocates from around the province who have come together to encourage the government of Alberta to co-ordinate organ donation, create an organ donor public awareness campaign, and create an intent-to-donate registry for the citizens of Alberta. I should also note that Barb held a career in Alberta Education for some 30 years. Barb is here today in support of and to observe the discussion of the private member's bill that's now on the government agenda, Bill 207, and to observe second reading of Bill 207. She's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that she please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Maxine Cook. Maxine is here advocating against the hundred-kilometre radius policy regarding the placement of seniors. She's concerned that seniors are separated from their spouses, family, and community at a time when they are at their most vulnerable. These are the people who built this province, and it's unconscionable that we are denying them the best care we can give. We must ensure that they have adequate space, professional public care, and are kept with their spouses within distance of their family. I would ask Maxine to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. In-Young Chang, who immigrated to Canada 40 years ago with his family from Seoul, South Korea. He's a retired businessman, a Vietnam war veteran, and he served in the famed Tiger division from South Korea on the allied side of the forces. He's a past president of the Canada Korea Business Association. In 2006 he became the recipient of the highest honour for a civilian from South Korea, the order of the Republic of South Korea, for the work he did over the years in facilitating improved relations between Canada and South Korea. In 1990 he was asked by Premier Gary Filmon to run as an MLA in Winnipeg, but he preferred to serve in other ways instead. He is joined here today by his family: his loving wife, Susan; his son, Dr. Jason Chang; Jason's loving wife, Dr. Alanna Chang; and their two-year-old daughter, Amelia. Hon. members, it's Asian Heritage Month. Please help me welcome a proud Asian-Canadian who has helped build this country.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Shami Sandhu. Mr. Sandhu is the current chair of the Edmonton Police Commission, a position he's held since 2009. In addition, he presently serves as the chair of the Alberta Association of Police Governance. Over almost 20 years he's been a tireless volunteer community member here in Edmonton.

With him today is Mrs. Kyla Knight. Mrs. Knight is a realtor in Edmonton with Re/Max River City and an active community volunteer, supporting the Stollery hospital foundation, the Children's Miracle Network, and Little Warriors.

I would ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, it's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our ministerial intern Mariel Aramburu. She recently completed her studies at McGill University, where she majored in political science and international development. She has spent summers with the world food program in Panama and working on inter-American policy in Washington, DC. Mariel comes to us from Calgary and is very excited to be working with IIR and looks forward to gaining a deeper perspective into government. I'd ask Mariel to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's with mixed emotions that I do my second introduction. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members our IIR press secretary, Mark Cooper. Mark will be leaving us next week to work with industry in Calgary. Mark has served the people of Alberta through the government of Alberta for 13 years, working in nine departments for eight ministers. I can tell you that he has been of terrific service and support to the work that we do in our ministry. Mark, please rise, take a bow, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Associate Minister of Wellness.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege for me to stand and introduce to you and through you to the House Sandi Kaser. Sandi is a hard-working Alberta accountant, who is finding it very difficult to continue her work. This is because Sandi is one of many on the wait-list for completely new corneas. The wait-list is three years long. Sandi is concerned about transplant wait times for Albertans while her ability to work, her quality of life, and her freedom to go about everyday activities deteriorates. She's excited about the changes to Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, and hopes this will encourage people to donate their organs and tissue to those in need. Please stand, Sandi, and we'll give you a warm welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to introduce two representatives from one of Canada's most respected charities, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Since 1918 the CNIB has been dedicated to independence and self-determination for Canadians with vision loss, and their work is critical considering the sobering statistics. Seventy-five

per cent of vision loss is avoidable, yet another Canadian loses their vision every 12 minutes. Thankfully, the CNIB passionately provides community-based support and knowledge, and along with consumer organizations, they ensure that Canadians who are blind or are partially sighted have the confidence and skills and opportunities to fully participate in life.

With us today during Vision Health Month is John McDonald. You might recognize his name. He's the former publisher of the *Edmonton Journal* and CNIB's new executive director for not only Alberta but also the Northwest Territories. His list of accomplishments is a long one, and he looks forward to applying those experiences to ensure that blind and partially sighted Albertans receive the services they need.

I've been looking forward to this introduction for a while, Mr. Speaker. With us today is the incomparable Diane Bergeron, national director of government relations and advocacy. Diane is joined by her beautiful guide dog, Lucy. Lucy is a working dog. Along with working for the CNIB and volunteering for numerous organizations, Diane is a truly inspirational athlete. As a matter of fact, July 7 will be a magical day. Diane will be participating in the Great White North Half Ironman as the only blind participant. Yes, Diane is that amazing.

John and Diane are in the public gallery. I'd ask all members to join me in offering the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fellow Rotarian and good friend, Michael Kuzek. He's accompanied by our rotary club's exchange student from France, Sixtine. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Paul Nemetchek, who through his involvement in the Wildrose has become a close friend of mine. We share a deep commitment to church and a passion for aviation. I'd ask him now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: 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 to all members of the Assembly – would you please stand as I mention your presence – members of the Singing Strings orchestra and their conductor, Petar Dundjerski. These young people gave us one of the most beautiful renditions of *O Canada* and the famous Chinese piece *Jasmine Flower* today.

Also with us today is the organizer for the orchestra and the luncheon that we enjoyed today, Mr. David Tam, and his beautiful family; chef and TV personality, Miles Quon; our *O Canada* soloist, Atiya Dato; and the dancer who led us through the energetic Bollywood dance this afternoon in the rotunda, Anjana Babbar.

Last but not least is Catrina Foldessy, my summer co-op student at my Calgary constituency office.

I want to thank all of you for coming to spend your time with us today and for helping to celebrate Asian Heritage Month. I would ask members of the House to join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Calgary-Foothills. If we're quick, we should be able to squeeze them in.

Mr. Jeneroux: Great. I'll be quick, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Leigh Allard. Leigh is the president of the Alberta-Northwest Territories Lung Association, a constituent of Edmonton-South West, and also a strong supporter of both my bill, compassionate care leave, and my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills' bill, Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013. I'd ask Leigh to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:50

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be quick. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you 16 individuals seated in the members' gallery who are here today in support of my Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013. I'd ask that they stand as I read their names. From the University of Alberta hospital are transplant surgeons Dr. Norman Kneteman, Dr. Lori West, and Dr. Atul Humar. I don't know if he made it today or not. We have the executive of the Alberta Donates Life Coalition, Nancy MacDonald. We have a co-chair of the Alberta Donates Life Coalition, who was introduced earlier. Barb Esdale is here. Another co-chair of the Alberta Donates Life Coalition, Sharon Marcus, is here as well. Sharon's son Ben Kanee is here today and is a kidney recipient. We've got Tony White, a liver recipient; Kim O'Reilly, a lung recipient. We've got Flavia Robles and Tammy Fifield from the Kidney Foundation of Canada and Rachelle Sandy from the Canadian Liver Foundation. Leigh Allard, who was introduced early, from the Alberta Lung Association is here as well.

Also in attendance as supporters of Bill 207 are Candace Webber from Calgary, who just happens to be my wonderful sister-in-law; and her mother, Eunice Hogan, from Edmonton.

I thank you all sincerely for your support here today, and I'd ask that we give them the warm welcome. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the clock requires us to move on to Oral Question Period. I know you know this, but let's be reminded that the House sat until 4:10 a.m. Therefore, I would ask for your patience with each other as we go through this next 50 minutes.

Oral Question Period

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

Breast Cancer Diagnostic Test

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, Angelina Jolie, the film actress, has brought the issue of breast cancer front and centre with a column she wrote today in the *New York Times*. She revealed she took the drastic step of undergoing a preventative double mastectomy because she was at extreme risk for a very aggressive form of breast cancer. Many other young women are facing these kinds of dire decisions as they decide the best course of treatment. The Oncotype DX cancer test, that I mentioned to the minister last week, is a test that helps determine which treatment is the best for a breast cancer patient. Can the minister tell us when Alberta women might expect a decision on this test?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Oncotype DX test is very useful technology and, as the hon. member noted last week, has been adopted by some provinces in Canada. As is the case in Alberta, we have a health technology assessment process for new technologies. This is a very important test. I've asked my department to expedite the review process, exercising, of course, the due diligence that's required, and we will come forward with a decision as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that. I did meet with some members of a group called Rethink Breast Cancer in my office earlier today. They're focused on breast cancer education and advocacy for young women, and that's why the timely approval of the Oncotype DX cancer test is so important. It's a test that can prevent needless chemotherapy. Now, the test has been approved and recommended by the Alberta breast cancer group and five other provinces. Will the minister tell us when he thinks we might get a decision on when this would be covered in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we reviewed in an answer I gave to a similar question last week, the process of assessing health technologies for adoption in Alberta is a rigorous one. It's evidence based, and it is one that does not involve politicians exercising judgment. We'll take the appropriate time to review this test as quickly as possible. There are many new technologies that are available on a monthly basis that could be introduced in the health care system here or across the country. We'll look at the evidence, and we'll make a decision as quickly as we can.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the women I met with today told of her experience with chemotherapy. Her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 31 and died at age 39, and she received her diagnosis at age 33. As a result of her chemo treatment, she went through early menopause, and it has ended her chance to have children. That's a real-life story of the negative effects of chemotherapy. It is exactly the type of outcome that the Oncotype DX test can prevent. Isn't the quick approval of a proven test that can reduce negative health consequences while saving millions of dollars something that Alberta should be doing right away?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the appropriate review process involves an examination of evidence, including experts within my department but also broadly, in our universities and in other centres of research. It also involves looking at the basis for similar decisions by other jurisdictions. I'm sure the hon. member would not want to suggest to this House that any of us as elected people should be solely determining whether or not new technologies are made available. They must be safe, they must be accessible, and they must demonstrate the results that they're alleged to demonstrate. In the case of Oncotype DX the results do appear very promising to lay people. We'll wait for the experts.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader. Second main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been three years. I hope I don't have to ask this question again in the fall.

Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, there are problems the Premier is facing that strain her claims of exemplary government accountability and transparency. Staff severance packages are way out of whack, more than \$2 million over the last three years in the Premier's office. Her predecessors made these kinds of severance and employment contracts public, but this Premier continues to hide them, raising even more questions about how things operate in her office. The Privacy Commissioner has previously ruled that such arrangements must be disclosed. When will the Premier comply?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, under this Premier's leadership this government has delivered unprecedented transparency. [interjections] That's exactly what this Premier has promised to deliver, and that's exactly what we're doing. There is an independent process, and that independent process should be followed. That's exactly where this issue lies.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, that \$2 million covers the severance for 18 employees – that's the information we managed to squeeze out of the Premier's office – but that's an average of about \$115,000 per employee. Now, it's one outrage for the Premier to hire a bunch of staff with six-figure salaries, but can she explain why she's signing off on contracts with six-figure severance packages?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have unprecedented transparency. We have an expense disclosure policy. We have taken steps to disclose more information, that is unprecedented in this province. [interjections] We are providing incredible access, but we also have processes that should be followed. We have processes that should not be politically interfered with, and I think you should join me in respecting the autonomy and the independence of those processes. We have a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that should be respected. The act itself says that it should be independent. That's what you should respect. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've asked for your patience and your respect. People asking questions have the right to ask them. People answering them have the right to answer them. I would ask you to please give them the floor when they are recognized to do either of the two.

The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier is going to make the AT and T minister answer the question, she could at least brief him so that he could give us proper information.

If the Premier gives you the heave-ho, you either get a golden handshake or you get a soft landing somewhere in the administration. Just in the last year nearly \$600,000 went to departing employees, many of whom had worked in the Premier's office for just a few months. Doesn't the Premier agree that she needs to be transparent and accountable to Alberta taxpayers about how she rewards the people she fires?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting to me in this House that we're having two debates going on right now, both with respect to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I remind this House that there are two parts to that act. One is freedom of information, and one is privacy. I find it ridiculous that when we're having a debate around the children first legislation that we have the opposition say that we can't breach privacy, but when they want to score political points, it's okay.

The Speaker: The hon. leader for your third main set of questions.

Ms Smith: As the Premier knows, the Privacy Commissioner has already ruled on this issue of disclosing the severance packages.

Member for Edmonton-Manning

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, when a member of this Assembly faces allegations of wrongdoing, all of us are affected. The Member for Edmonton-Manning faces a very serious allegation today and deserves the opportunity to clear his name and restore his reputation. To that end, we have asked the Premier to take the appropriate steps and appoint an independent prosecutor to examine the evidence. The matter goes beyond the Conflicts of Interest Act and beyond the mandate of the Ethics Commissioner. It's a question of illegality that requires a proper investigation. Does the Premier agree?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have been advised that this matter is under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner, so let's be very, very careful about any further questions in this regard.

Government House Leader, if you wish to comment in light of what I've just said, I invite you to do so.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a matter involving a private member. The private member has done the honourable thing and asked the Ethics Commissioner to investigate. He's also indicated to the Premier and to me as House leader and to the caucus whip that he will be recusing himself from caucus during the process of that investigation so as not to interfere with government progress and government business. He has done the honourable thing. I think we should respect that. We should also respect the fact that this is a private matter with the member. It's a matter that, allegedly, is before the courts, and it is an allegation still.

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is not about an ethics inquiry. There are two very different accounts of events that need to be examined. On the one hand, there is a sworn affidavit, signed by the member, claiming he was in India looking after a family issue during the time in question, but there are Legislative Assembly filings that place the member in Calgary at the same time attending meetings on behalf of the government. They can't both be true. The maximum penalty for swearing a false affidavit is 14 years. Again, will the Premier agree to order an independent prosecutor to investigate the matter?

Mr. Hancock: The allegations the hon. member raised are with respect to an affidavit that was filed in a court proceeding. That's the best place for anybody to determine whether the affidavit is correct or not. If the process that's undertaken there determines there's a problem with an affidavit that's filed in that process, they're the ones to make the appropriate recommendation.

The Speaker: Let's be very careful going down this line much further, hon. member. I'll invite your final question.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's small comfort that the member has stepped down from government caucus and asked the Ethics Commissioner to look into possible violations. Other, larger questions remain. Why does existing legislation allow for such information about an MLA's business practices to go unreported, and why does it take an expensive FOIP request or a tip to the media to expose it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, these are allegations, and they are allegations being appropriately investigated at the request of the member.

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

Support for Palliative Care

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I pointed out that the \$586,000 that the Premier's office paid out in severance in the last year alone would be better spent on programs important to Albertans. A great example and one this government is decimating is palliative home care in Calgary. Twenty-four part-time registered nurses are being laid off, equivalent to seven full-time positions, for an alleged saving of \$490,000. To the Premier: why are your ex-staffers more deserving of public funds than dying Albertans and their families?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to talk about home care, we're very, very interested in talking about home care. The fact of the matter is that home-care staff across the Calgary region are being redeployed in an effort by Alberta Health Services to deliver better care and better outcomes to patients. There has been an increase in the number of licensed practical nurses involved in that program. Discussions are under way with the United Nurses of Alberta and AHS as to how to redeploy the balance. Patient care is not affected by this change.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, you understand how important this issue is. When you were Health minister, you visited my dying father in his dying days at home.

This House passed the compassionate care bill yesterday, and I commend the Member for Edmonton-South West for introducing that important act. Unfortunately, however, this Premier's inhumane cuts to palliative home care in Calgary have greatly diminished his achievement. This government is withdrawing essential support from dying Albertans and their family members. Premier, beyond the cold calculations of accounting, how do you think cutting palliative care supports makes any sense?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, that is a gross exaggeration, a misrepresentation of the facts in this case. The hon. member has no interest in talking about policy with respect to home care. What he is very good at is apparently picking up an article in the media today and commenting on some staff redeployment decisions that have been made by Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, these changes will not affect patient care. AHS has a responsibility to deploy staff across the system in the most appropriate way to ensure that we have better care, better outcomes for our population, and better value for taxpayer dollars.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I don't know when this guy became a health care expert when we've got doctors and nurses that will tell you differently.

According to the United Nurses of Alberta these cruel cuts will result in only one registered nurse being on standby after hours. If that nurse gets called out to give comfort and care to another Albertan in his or her final moments, families will be forced to call 911, Mr. Speaker. Patients will end up in the ER, and they will die in a cold hallway. Premier, you may think you're saving \$490,000, but I'll tell you that it costs a heck of a lot more when you end up in the hospital in acute care. If for no other reason, Premier, will you just please cancel these heartless cuts for humane reasons?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I am not at all surprised to hear the leader of this party stand up and make these wild allegations. This seems to be what he does every single year. It is not appropriate to make any suggestions that are going to allow people to feel afraid or not have confidence in the public health care system. We have Alberta Health Services, which is in place to make the decisions with respect to how to ensure that we have the most effective patient care. That is their job, and we have confidence that they are doing it well and not impacting patient care.

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

Member for Edmonton-Manning
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Manning is facing some very serious allegations. The member has apparently announced that he will withdraw from the PC caucus for the present and has referred the matter to the Ethics Commissioner. My question is to the Premier. In the interests of maintaining public confidence in this government, will she clarify the member's status and tell the Assembly what actions she is prepared to take to rectify this situation?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as has already been clarified in the House, the hon. member has himself asked the Ethics Commissioner to do the investigation and clear his name. He has himself indicated that he has withdrawn from caucus and from government activities during the course of that investigation. I would remind the hon. member that these are allegations with respect to a matter which is before the courts. The courts themselves will determine whether or not the affidavit is in an appropriate form or not. There's no better place than a judge to make that determination.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we have had this clarified now four times. If you have some new angle there that is within the rules and guidelines, let's hear what it is.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Member for Edmonton-Manning signed an affidavit stating that he was out of the country when, according to documents that I will table later, he was in the province attending committee meetings of the government. Under section 131 of the Criminal Code signing a false affidavit is perjury, a criminal act. It is not an ethics matter for the Ethics Commissioner; it's a matter for the police. To the Premier: will she ask the police to initiate an investigation into whether or not there was a violation of the Criminal Code by the member, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Asked, Mr. Speaker, and answered.

The Speaker: Final question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government certainly has not answered that question at all.

Albertans have a right to expect the highest ethical standards from their elected officials. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we're getting the counsel for the defence here and not straight answers. In order to restore public confidence with the government and the Assembly, will the Premier immediately ask the police to investigate whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Manning violated the Criminal Code by committing perjury, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there are two essential elements. One is the question with respect to filings to the Ethics Commissioner,

and the Ethics Commissioner has been asked to investigate by the member. The other is with respect to an affidavit that is part of a court proceeding, and the best place to determine the veracity of that affidavit and whether there's any issue with respect to that affidavit is within that court proceeding. If there's an issue with it, that will be referred by the courts. If there's no issue found in that proceeding, one would assume it should end there.

Conflicts-of-interest Legislation

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, this government's facade of accountability can't seem to hold together for very long before yet another investigation has to be called. Ethics scandals and complete ignorance of right and wrong have all become hallmarks of this PC government, of what has become known as the PC culture of corruption. It undermines the confidence Albertans have in all of us elected individuals. With the review into the Conflicts of Interest Act currently under way, will the Justice minister commit to cleaning up this loose legislation?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as many people have said before me today, we have independent processes that this government has established that work. We have a Conflicts of Interest Act. We have an Election Act, that we have brought in ourselves, that allows unparalleled transparency, as the Associate Minister of AT and T had indicated. I think that this member – I know he is very well trained in the law – should get behind this and realize that Alberta is a leader in this area.

2:10

Mr. Saskiw: Given that neither the conflicts legislation or the office of the Ethics Commissioner caught these alleged indiscretions, will the Justice minister admit that it is now time to reform the law, or is he scared that more skeletons are going to keep falling out of the closet?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, there actually is a conflicts-of-interest review going on right now, and I welcome that member to make his own submissions. This is fully independent, again, of any political interference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've now seen former cabinet minister Evan Berger sail right through the conflicts-of-interest legislation and that this Premier has promised to raise the bar on transparency, does this Justice minister agree with me that if he continues to just sit there and do nothing about this legislation, all Albertans are going to lose any confidence they had left in this government?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, again, it saddens me the lack of respect that this member has for the independent processes of this Legislature, which have been proven to work time and time again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Domestic Violence

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instances of domestic violence in Alberta are unacceptably high and stretch across all demographic groups. This isn't just a big-city problem. It stretches to rural Alberta and all types of communities across this entire province. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Where can our abused women go to get help?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Domestic violence is more than a social problem. It actually attacks people where they should be the safest, in their home. I often encourage people to go and report it. If you feel that there is domestic violence, please go and report it to the local police or RCMP. I've met with many women, and they often say to me: "Well, why didn't anybody report it? The neighbours heard something. They didn't report something." We all have to be vigilant in getting rid of domestic violence in Alberta.

Ms Olesen: To the same minister: what are you doing to combat domestic violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, this is an issue that Alberta Justice takes very seriously. We've funded 21 projects since '08, totalling \$15.7 million. This includes the integrated domestic violence treatment program in Leduc, the Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society, the Connect family and sexual abuse network, and Taking Shelter with Literacy. We simply could not combat this problem if it wasn't for these community-based partners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Olesen: Thank you. Lastly, if you think a friend or neighbour is a victim of domestic violence, how do you go about reporting it?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I would indicate that you can call the family violence information line at 310.1818. There is information and service available in 170 languages. I also would be remiss if I didn't mention that I don't think this is just an issue for one gender or the other. This is an issue for everybody. I think that in many cases men have to stand up, report it, and create an example for the next generation.

Labour Negotiations with Teachers

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, on March 15 this government rolled out the red carpet in Calgary to proclaim it had finally reached an agreement with teachers. The problem is that they spiked the football before they got to the end zone. Here we are nearly two months later, and we still don't have a deal. The supposed agreement reached in March in reality wasn't an agreement, so now we're going to have to legislate one. To the Education minister. We all want what's best for kids, and we all want stability in the education system. How did it come to this?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Question, this is a very good... [interjections] Mr. Speaker, you know, it's been a long couple of days already.

Mr. Speaker, that's actually a very good question. You know, the announcement in March was a great milestone. It was a great announcement, but it was announced as a tentative deal, and that deal needed to go out and be ratified by 62 ATA locals and 62 school boards, which is a huge task and why we've been working so hard with the ATA and the ASBA and all school boards for the last two months.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, I will give the Education minister some credit. I know he's had some very long days and nights of late.

Given that Alberta school boards, though, saw the supposed agreement for the very first time on the same day that the Premier and the Education minister, as I said, rolled out the red carpet and gathered the TV cameras around to announce a deal in Calgary, doesn't the minister see that the way he went about this process was all wrong and that he should have involved the 62 school boards of elected officials from the beginning?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this is a concern that's come up, and I'm happy to clarify. The school boards have been involved from day one. This has been a three-year process. This has not been a two-month process. It's spanned three ministers. These negotiations were stalled and started several times. What I can tell you is that the deal that was presented to the ASBA and the ATA in March is substantively the same as the deal that was presented to both those bodies February 20. Their input helped build that.

Mr. McAllister: Again to the Education minister. Given the clumsy handling of this file from broken-down negotiations to premature celebrations of victory to potentially proposed contracts and given that there are more than a few boards who say that they've signed out of pressure and feel like they were bullied, I'll ask the Education minister: what are we going to do to fix this problem going forward so we don't wind up in this situation again?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, Mr. Speaker, another good question. It is a clumsy situation, and it's a clumsy situation because we realize that for the sake of our kids the best thing for the education system is to have a province-wide deal and to have long-term deals. In order to do that, the province has to have a seat at the table. We don't have a bargaining structure that permits that, so for the last three years we've been the moderator, the facilitator, the meat in the sandwich, trying to get a deal done. Now that we're there – and we are there, and I want to give credit to the ATA and the ASBA – we need to also work together going forward to build a new bargaining structure that's right for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-McCall.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government made a commitment to increase the transparency and accountability of government operations. However, there is still criticism about this government's information-sharing record, and that criticism continues. To the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation: what steps is this government taking to follow through on its commitments to Albertans?

Mr. Scott: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Under this Premier's leadership, as I said previously, we're delivering unprecedented transparency. We have an excellent record of responding to FOIP requests. In the year 2011-2012 we received approximately 4,200 FOIP requests. Ninety per cent of those FOIP requests were responded to within 30 days. We're building upon a very strong foundation of transparency. [interjections] The other side doesn't enjoy listening to the good work that this government is doing. They stand there heckling half the time. [interjections] They should be listening to the good work that this government

...

The Speaker: Hon. members. Edmonton-Centre, please. Whoever has the floor has just as much right to it as you do when you rise, and I'll stand up and defend you as well if I need to. Please, show some respect.

The hon. member. Second question.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many constituents, including some in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, who work with freedom of information requests are getting bogged down with requests and process. What is the government doing to make information more readily available?

Mr. Scott: Our Premier committed to doing a review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that's exactly the work that we're going to undertake. Our commitment to openness and transparency has been demonstrated. We have what's been described by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as the gold standard for an expense disclosure policy. I'll just give you the quote. "This new website and disclosure policy makes Alberta the gold-standard for expense transparency and an example for the rest of Canada to follow." That's a good foundation to build upon, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. He talks about a foundation to build upon and suggests potential changes. When can we expect to see some of those changes?

Mr. Scott: Mr. Speaker, our work has already been under way. As I said, we've done one of the most comprehensive and well-regarded expense disclosure policies in Canada. We've done whistle-blower legislation. Our work to review FOIP is under way. In addition to that, we already disclose a lot of material. We have ministerial office expenses that are being disclosed. We have aircraft manifests that are being disclosed. Workplace fatality and injury records are disclosed. Alberta has an excellent record of being accountable and transparent. Our Premier has committed to building upon it, and that's exactly what we're going to do and deliver.

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

FOIP Legislation Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday and even today this PC government is grandstanding about the strengths of Alberta's FOIP legislation, but let's not forget that in her mandate letter to the Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation the Premier called on him to review the FOIP Act and recommend changes. To the minister. Either the minister failed to complete this review, or he has refused to make it public. Which is it, Mr. Minister?

2:20

Mr. Scott: I'd like to thank the member for the question. We are delivering a review of that act. That work is already under way. We're going to be doing a very comprehensive review. On this side of the House we want to make sure that we're engaging all Albertans. It's going to be a thorough review. I would encourage anybody in Alberta, even members of the opposition: if you have a point that you want to make, if you have input, we're going to take that into account in building an even better freedom of information and protection of privacy law.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that a 2012 freedom of information audit conducted by the newspapers of Canada gave Alberta a failing grade, saying that while FOIP requests are processed quickly, too little information is given out, and the same report questions the high level of fees associated with these requests, have you studied this, and what are you doing to pass next year's test?

Mr. Scott: Thanks again for the question. That's exactly why our Premier has shown leadership on this issue. During this process she is committed to making sure that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is reviewed, and that's exactly what we're going to be doing. There are challenges among many of the laws in Alberta. We have a good foundation that we're going to build upon, and we're going to do a very thorough consultation. I would encourage you and anyone who has concerns about the law to get engaged in the consultation. We want to make sure that every Albertan has an opportunity. At the same time, we're going to make sure that freedom of information is balanced with privacy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. There should be a legislative review, not behind closed doors, Mr. Speaker.

My final question is to the same minister. Given that the Premier's mandate letter also called on him to develop transparency legislation, is this something we will see in the future, or is it just smoke and mirrors?

Mr. Scott: Thank you for the question. It's definitely not smoke and mirrors. The only smoke and mirrors I see is coming from the opposition.

We are delivering an open and transparent government, and that's exactly what we're going to continue doing. As I said, we made a commitment to review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and that's exactly what we're going to do. It's not going to be behind closed doors. Every Albertan is going to have an opportunity to get engaged.

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

Labour Negotiations with Teachers

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By using legislation to force a contract on teachers and school boards, this government has lost sight of what is best for education in this province. It's no coincidence that the two teachers' locals that rejected the government's proposal, Elk Island and St. Albert, have a front-row seat to witness the tremendous growth in the economy of Alberta while they, the teachers, are forced to take an effective 10 per cent cut in wages over three years. To the minister. The money is there if we had the will to make it so. We saw the doctors get theirs and plenty more. Why is this government unwilling to provide a fair deal for teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a very fair deal, and we worked very hard on it. I'm not the only one that thinks it's a fair deal or thought this was a fair deal. Listen to this. This is from the *Calgary Herald* of March 15. "This is the time and place to make a deal . . . The teachers have given several years of zeros in exchange for improving classroom conditions and considering the austerity budget that this government has, it would be foolish (for them) not to make a deal here and now. The time is right." Guess

who said that? It was the member opposite, from Edmonton-Calder. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, enough of the interjections. Let's carry on with the second question.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this Education budget has removed hundreds of millions of dollars from schools, which results in larger class sizes, teacher layoffs, and program cuts, I ask the minister: how is it even remotely possible to believe that any assurance to improve working conditions for teachers is anything but just another empty, broken promise?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think we're going to have a chance to debate that at length here this day because those things are actually written into the agreement. That is one of the main things that the ATA wanted to see move forward. We helped facilitate that, and the SBA embraced that.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that using legislation to force an agreement makes a mockery of collective bargaining, undermines the authority of democratically elected trustees, reduces the integrity of the teaching profession, and punctuates this government's attack on public education in general, why won't this government restore funding before we see long-term, irreparable damage to our public education system?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the member talks about democracy. What is he going to say to those 60 ATA locals that voted in favour of this? Are they going to be overridden by two ATA locals that voted against it? He talks about the integrity of the teaching profession. What about the integrity of the 97 per cent of teachers that voted for this deal? Are they going to be held hostage because we've got a broken bargaining structure?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Wholesale Electricity Market Pricing

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's handling of the electricity market is hurting small and medium-sized businesses as prices soar. The Market Surveillance Administrator's own study finds that a small oligarchy of generators is the primary cause for the price spikes in electricity. Will the minister admit that there is a small group of companies controlling the market, or will he state here and now that the Market Surveillance Administrator's findings are wrong?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, one of the joys of responding to questions from that hon. member is the fact that he's able to take points of data from here and points of data from there and connect a completely illogical connection.

Mr. Speaker, the answer today is that electricity prices – I don't know; the regulated rate option average for May was 7 cents. This is hardly skyrocketing prices for electricity.

An Hon. Member: Try again, Joe.

Mr. Anglin: Try facts again, too.

Given that five major companies own 70 per cent of the electricity generation in the province and these companies can legally withhold electricity from the market to elevate the price, can the minister explain how these five major companies compete to serve more than 3 and a half million Albertans?

Mr. Hughes: Well, just to keep the hon. member up to date, it's 3.8 million Albertans. Actually, 3.8 million Albertans represents approximately 20 per cent of the consumption, and a whole industrial base represents 80 per cent of the consumption of electricity in this province, Mr. Speaker. That is a very competitive market, and the Market Surveillance Administrator is one of the watchdogs that's in place to ensure that there is fair and in-the-public-interest competition amongst all players in the supply . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They're the ones that are saying that the market is being organized here.

Given that this month's electricity prices are on pace to set an all-time high and given that a committee of MLAs appointed to review the retail market will not be reviewing the wholesale market, will the minister commit to reviewing the circumstances that are contributing to the price spikes in the wholesale electricity market?

Mr. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, once again, unconnected facts trying to connect unconnectable dots. I would just point out that the regulated option average year to date for all providers is 7.85 cents per kilowatt hour. This is not evidence of a growing increase in prices. The hon. member is trying to frighten people with evidence that is unconnected to what people pay for electricity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Westlock Health Care Centre Laboratory Services

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard from many constituents with regard to the Alberta Health Services decision to remove microbiology, immunochemistry, and other testing from Westlock health care centre laboratory. This decision is a concern for two reasons. The most important one is patient care, and the second is the effect the associated job losses will have on the local community. To the Minister of Health: what impact will this decision have on patient care in my constituency?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question and certainly commend her for advocating on behalf of her constituents. The answer to the question regarding patients is that they will not see any change in their care, and physicians won't see any changes in the way that they order lab services in Westlock. A collection of tests will still be done locally, and in most cases specimens will be processed on the same day. Alberta Health Services is consolidating lab services across the province. This involves the redeployment of lab centres. We can expect to see more of this as time progresses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that, like many other rural community hospitals, Westlock health care centre is a major employer and helps keep the local economy strong, how will AHS address the fact that 5.15 jobs will be lost in this area?

2:30

Mr. Horne: Well, there is no doubt that in small communities across Alberta our health system does provide some very important job opportunities. There will be changes as we work to improve access to patient care and in this case lab services. There will be changes in job programs and services, but these will be

done, of course, ensuring that patient care remains a priority. As much as possible, Mr. Speaker, the staff reductions are managed through attrition and, of course, within the guidelines of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta collective agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health. As late as last night the town of Westlock council put forth a motion to ask for a six-month moratorium on the decision to move the lab services until the medical and lab staff have been consulted and are part of the solution. Would this be possible?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it is not possible. The changes I've explained are about consolidating services to make the best use of our health care dollars to provide high-quality and sustainable lab services for Albertans. While I certainly empathize with the member and I empathize with the members of the council of the town of Westlock, I'm sure they will understand that Alberta Health Services is striving to keep everyone whose position is affected working within the organization and that these reductions may be managed as much as possible through attrition.

Thank you.

Postsecondary Education Program Funding

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, the minister of advanced education has done a good job jeopardizing the future of our province. Because of his heavy-handed cuts to front-line education 32 workers at Red Deer College will be out of a job, much-needed programs will be lost, and our students will be forced to go elsewhere to find the education that they need. Minister, you can only bury your head in the sand for so long. How does the minister's heavy-handed cuts to education fit the government's plan to build Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, they're basing their opinions on assumptions. One, we know for a fact that programs can't be eliminated in this province until the minister reviews the proposals and decides to sign off on them. That is based on what is best for students, what is available for students, and what alternatives are available for students. If there are administrative positions that are being eliminated within colleges, I appreciate the fact that schools are making difficult decisions. They have budgetary realities to live with, just like we do. One thing I can tell him. If they had to live with their budget, they'd be firing many, many more people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that your budget is cutting programs at Red Deer College such as pharmacy technician, early learning and child care, health care aide, and automotive service technician and given that Alberta already has a worker shortage in many of these areas, how can this government claim to be building this province yet shortchanging Albertans on the skilled professionals we need for our future?

Mr. Lukaszuk: This government has made a commitment to advanced education by increasing advanced education's budget to the degree of 49 per cent over the last 10 years. Now, that shows real commitment, and the commitment is to work consistently with schools and with presidents and with chairs, Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition. They choose to be NDP on certain days when they want to protect programs, but then they want to be an ultra right-wing party when they want to cut budgets. Our schools

know what they're dealing with, and we have a very good relationship with those schools.

Mr. Fox: Well, Mr. Speaker, we aren't the party that is introducing politburo-style programming on our universities.

Given that the president of Red Deer College said that this minister has created the most difficult experience that faculty and staff have ever had to go through and given that despite this government's pleas to the contrary times really are pretty good here in Alberta, why is this minister cutting the legs out from underneath our students and our postsecondary institutions while at the same time claiming that this government is building for the future?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I didn't quite hear the question. He lost me at politburo. Let me tell you, if I may, what we are doing right now. We're working with all presidents and all chairs throughout Campus Alberta. We're making sure that administrative efficiencies are found. We're making sure that a variety of programs exist for students to choose from. We're making sure that if there are any programs that are eliminated, those programs will be otherwise available to our students. We're making sure that we prepare our students for the opportunities and careers that exist and will exist in our province in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Condominium Property Act Consultation

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the inner-city riding of Calgary-Currie we're growing upward, not necessarily outward. Calgary-Currie constituents continue to seek clarity and certainty that will protect owners who need repairs and maintenance of managed property. While it seems the bare-land condominium amendment will help bare-land condominium owners, I ask the Minister of Service Alberta: now that the bare-land condominium amendment has been passed, exactly how will the bare-land condo owners be protected by the Condominium Property Act?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank this member for her advocacy on this issue. She's brought up issues relating to condominium owners repeatedly, and she's also helped facilitate discussion at a local level with many, many condominium owners, something I hope others will actually engage in, having real conversation, dialogue, and real ideas. We've had about 5,000 responses to our condominium consultation, and now we're compiling all of that information to see how best we're able to bring forward changes that further continue to protect Alberta condominium owners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that boards rely on condominium managers for day-to-day operations and maintenance and advice on issues dealing with legislation and their bylaws, what kind of safeguards will ensure that managers meet specific standards that are going to instill trust in bare-land condo owners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on early indications from the results of the consultation, it appears that a great majority

of Albertans are very much inclined to support the notion of having further regulation or licensing of condominium property managers just because their role is so significant. This is something that we're looking to pursue. I would invite all members of this Assembly, before they stand up and take credit for our ideas, to actually put forward some ideas. Maybe they'll do that this time around.

Ms Cusanelli: Again to the same minister . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: You have the floor, Calgary-Currie. Carry on.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that owners, as has happened in my constituency, are often forced to give up their disputes with condominium boards rather than force a drawn-out and costly court battle, what is the other recourse that can be taken to help boards and owners resolve disputes effectively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank members of the opposition for pointing out how youthful I am and how vibrant I am. I very much appreciate it. [interjections] Much appreciated. Very vibrant. Thank you, Member for Airdrie, for also repeating that.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that just as I think sometimes in this House you have to play the role of mediator in disputes and you have to play the role of finding resolutions to disputes that often take place, I feel that we need to find a similar role for condominium owners. We would in fact be one of the first provinces to come out with this. We're looking at what the best ways are to protect condo owners, and we actually deliver results, not just press releases.

Funding for Hospital Infrastructure

Mr. Barnes: This government continues to ignore critical health care infrastructure priorities. Alberta Health Services has identified an obstetrical department redevelopment as an immediate need in Red Deer in its 2011 capital submission. This project is required in order to meet existing demand due to higher-than-expected birth rates and significant population growth. The provision of a dedicated C-section operating room would relieve pressure on the main surgical unit. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what is this government waiting for?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've explained in this House quite a few times that we work with colleagues from Health and other departments, and we build the priorities that they bring forward to us. We have a very aggressive build in our capital projects going forward. We've got \$5.2 billion this year, and we've got \$15 billion over the next three years, but every day in this House the opposition brings forward their pet projects. Apparently, they don't think \$5.2 billion is enough money to be spending. I think they want us to spend more, and in order to do that, we've got to borrow.

Mr. Barnes: Given that Alberta Health Services considers this an immediate need because, quote, there is no access to an operating room for an emergency C-section, which presents a high patient-safety risk, will the Minister of Health explain to residents of Red Deer and area why this government is delaying this project and putting mothers and newborns at risk?

2:40

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, my colleague the hon. Minister of Infrastructure makes a good point. Of that \$5.2 billion in the provincial capital plan, \$2.1 billion is allocated for Health. I'd further agree with him that it's an open question as to what the opposition thinks is an appropriate amount. What I can tell the hon. member is that this is one of several high-priority projects for Alberta Health Services. We have worked with AHS consistently to try to approach these projects in order of priority need. It's interesting. When the hon. member doesn't agree that his constituency's project is the top priority, we get these sorts of questions.

Mr. Barnes: It's about priorities again, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the government failed to acknowledge the immediate need for this project and given that we only became aware of this pressing need through yet another FOIP request, will the Minister of Infrastructure finally commit to releasing the government's list of infrastructure projects by priority so Albertans will know when they are getting their projects, and once and for all, will he be open and transparent and stop being so secretive and political?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I have to say it in the House. Our priority list is our projects that are approved. There's \$5.2 billion approved this year. That list is on the website. Obviously, that's not enough. If they want us to borrow more and build more, stand up and say that.

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

Small-business Assistance

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small business can be a powerful engine, an opportunity for economic growth. As is the case in Alberta, small businesses account for 96 per cent of all businesses, 27 per cent of our GDP, and 36 per cent of employment in the province. The success of small business depends on many factors, including financial incentives offered by government and by lending institutions. Our neighbour to the south, the United States, employs legislative measures that guarantee that a certain percentage of government contracts are awarded to small business. My questions are to the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education. Is this measure something that we have considered here in Alberta, and if not, why not?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we pride ourselves as government on having an open procurement process. There are no preferential bids being extended to any particular size of business. As long as government requirements relevant to whatever product it is that is being procured are met and as long as we get it at the lowest possible price within the right time parameters, that is the business that gets the order. We do appreciate that small businesses are very important, and that is why this government continuously strives to develop a climate for small businesses to thrive in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what other programs and incentives does Alberta have so that we can maintain a thriving small-business environment?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of them, too many to list right now. Business Link is one that definitely comes

to mind, that assists small businesses in cutting through some administrative processes that they have to go through. Another one is a recently opened up website on alberta.ca where you will find, for example, all the regulations listed. You can review regulations, see the expiry dates of regulations, and see which regulations pertain to your business. There's a great deal of assistance to small businesses not only during the start-up phase of a business but as they continue to prosper.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question: how much financial support does Budget 2013 provide for small business, and is this a change from previous years?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we continue to fund the services that I mentioned. There are a number of them. Some are delivered directly by government; some are delivered indirectly. We will continue to make sure that in this province we develop a climate within which small businesses can start and can thrive in the future. We will definitely not create any preferential treatment for any particular genre or size of businesses, but we want to make sure that they have ready access to information and that our administrative regulatory system is not a burden to growth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Ministerial Statements, could we have your permission and unanimous consent to revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests? Does anyone oppose that request?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: We'll have the Minister of Education, followed by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members several members in the gallery that we have joining us here today from the education community, some stakeholders that were in the building to get briefed on what we're going to do with the legislation with the education settlement here. They're here to see first reading. The stakeholders include – and I believe we've got them all up there – Jacquie Hansen, president of the Alberta School Boards Association; Dean Sarnecki from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association; Joan Carr, metro director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents; Kath Rhyason, the executive director of CASS as well; Jeanne Fontaine, the president of the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta; and I believe that's Mary Lynne Campbell, the executive director from the Public School Boards' Association. If I've missed others, I apologize. I think we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Brian Storseth, Member of Parliament for Westlock-St. Paul and all-around defender of personal liberty.

First elected to Parliament in 2006, Mr. Storseth currently sits on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Another key aspect of

his portfolio is his chairing of the mining caucus. His work on eliminating the federal hate speech provision is, I am sure, encouraging the Premier and Justice minister as they look to make good on their word to repeal Alberta's hate speech, or hurt feelings, provision.

He is known in Ottawa and across Canada as a true tough-on-crime Conservative with a strong record of standing up for Canadians under the leadership of Prime Minister Harper. I'd ask that Mr. Storseth please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Government House Leader has caught my attention.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In anticipation of Ministerial Statements and other matters, might we ask for unanimous consent now to extend the clock past 3 o'clock to complete the Routine.

The Speaker: Hon. members, you've heard the request for unanimous consent. Does anyone object to giving that unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, once again today we had 102 questions and answers in spite of a few testy moments, which is a good indication that we're moving toward allowing as many people who want to ask questions to get up and ask them and for answers to be given. I want to particularly commend Sherwood Park today for not having any preamble whatsoever to her questions. It's a good lesson for others to learn. Yesterday's shining example was Edmonton-Gold Bar. So, obviously, the two of you are doing very well, seated where you are.

Let us move on, then.

Ministerial Statements

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

Transitioning Services for PDD Clients

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform this House and Albertans of the situation we face in our efforts to provide supports to persons with disabilities. We're all beginning to hear from parents or guardians who believe they will see significant cuts in services for their loved ones. They believe that service reductions are driven by the resources available within the disabilities supports budget. This is evident in questions asked in this House, in concerns expressed by my colleagues, in the communities I visit, and in the letters and e-mails I receive.

Mr. Speaker, we're not adjusting services to individuals because of fiscal capacity identified in the budget, though clearly we have signalled that we intend to change the form and the purpose of the supports we provide. Changes in service levels, increased or reduced, will happen as a result of the fact that we are able to assess need, and we're going to allocate services based on need.

We're currently doing assessments of need for all of the individuals we support based upon the supports intensity scale, or SIS, as it's called. Those assessments show that there are a number of individuals whose support levels are greater than their measured need would indicate. I do not mean for a second, Mr. Speaker, to make light of their circumstances or to indicate that

they do not require any support, but I do mean to highlight that there are people who get supports beyond what is needed.

Mr. Speaker, the system identifies the needs of individuals on a scale of 1 to 7, with category 1 identifying those with low support needs and category 7 indicating that extraordinary behaviour supports are needed. We're finding that a number of individuals who are currently receiving significant supports do not appear to have the needs that such support levels would indicate. Many of them fall within category 1.

2:50

Among those, Mr. Speaker, who fall within category 1, we are currently providing an alarming range of services, from one individual who receives \$114 per year in supports to one individual who receives just under \$300,000 per year in supports. This clearly underlines the fact that for some individuals the supports are currently allocated based on reasons other than need. I cannot support such a model because it's not defensible or sustainable. People who need services have to get services, but we cannot provide services beyond need.

Added to this reality, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that there are certainly real transitions identified in the budget. We intend to move from an emphasis on community access supports to an emphasis on supports that provide for inclusion and engagement in the community. As a result, service providers who offer supports are hearing that they could face contract impacts, sometimes significant ones, as we move to renew contracts. We are working collaboratively with service providers, so some of them have seen potential dollar figure impacts that are indeed very significant. These service providers are concerned, and they have expressed their concerns to parents. They have suggested that they may not be able to offer certain supports in the future, and that heightens the anxiety. I understand these concerns, and there is actually another side to this story, which I will discuss shortly.

First, I wish to further underline the scope of the supports situation. This has to be dealt with because I need to ensure that we provide supports to people who need them and that the system is sustainable. Consider this. Based on information from Statistics Canada, there are about 430,000 Albertans who have some form of disability, something that serves as a barrier. About 100,000 of those rely on natural and community supports, or they have found ways to engage and belong without assistance. They get no support, and they do not request any.

But there are about 330,000 people who have a range of more moderate to severe disabilities, who may have barriers to employment or community engagement, Mr. Speaker. Three hundred and thirty thousand. Our current disability services funding provides support for 25,000 people, or less than 10 per cent of that population. Some of that population may not need support – that's true – but many do and actually are currently asking for it, yet they are often excluded from the system because of their inability to access programs or because of entrance barriers like the IQ test. This is not the right or the responsible way to provide services.

The right thing to do is to provide supports based on need. That need first has to be fairly and impartially determined by conducting a scientific, internationally recognized assessment, which is what SIS is, Mr. Speaker. SIS does not fully consider the individual's circumstances, and because of this it cannot be used as a sole determinant of funding, but it is a credible measure of need. We will use SIS and factors like personal circumstances to determine service allocation.

The supports have to be considered on the basis of need, but they also have to be provided with compassion to people who we clearly understand are vulnerable. We will do so, Mr. Speaker,

and ensure that there are appeal mechanisms for assessments and for service decisions.

I do need now to talk about the other side of the story, that I referenced earlier, Mr. Speaker, when I talked about the impacts to service providers. At this point the providers have not actually seen a new contract. They do not know what impacts they face. When we implement the changes to the community access supports, there will indeed be impacts, but they will not be as severe as has been suggested. We are now working at the individual provider level. We are working on a way to ensure that the impacts to a provider are more manageable during this transition. To accomplish this, we will access supports from the budget in Human Services, and we may yet require additional support, which I will seek if necessary. This is going to be difficult, but at this stage I believe this goal can be accomplished.

Moving forward, we will continue our transition from community access supports toward supports that provide more engagement and inclusion in the community. Service providers who wish to contribute to this transition will find ample ways to do so, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we could not do this without them. This transition will ensure that persons with disabilities who can work, who want to work, including volunteer work, will have the supports in place to help them do so. We recognize that there are people who cannot benefit from such supports, who require community access supports as their only way to engage the community. The supports will be there for those that need them.

Mr. Speaker, that is the situation and the work we need to undertake. We have much to do, not the least of which is to finish the SIS assessments. This must be done in order to determine need going forward and to begin the work of allocating services based on that need. This will be difficult – and I signal that now – but we will transition this in a caring and compassionate way. We will not begin by withdrawing services. We will begin by having conversations with families and guardians and together finding a solution.

Mr. Speaker, I have described the difficult structural issues we face today and the significant amount of work that needs to be done. I am confident that we can make the changes we need, and I'm going to drive hard to do so because in the coming years the goal is to make further transitions. In the coming years I would like to remove the artificial barriers that currently exist at ages 18 and 65, transitions that disrupt lives while often adding no value to supports. I would like to remove the IQ test that prevents so many individuals from accessing supports that would allow them to pursue their goals.

Mr. Speaker, I have been mandated by the Premier to provide services and supports to all persons with disabilities through a system that provides for supports based on need, that provides a continuum of supports as people age and change, and that provides supports in a compassionate manner. I am also mandated to ensure that the support system is open, transparent, measurable, and accountable, and it has to be sustainable. I am honoured to take that task on, and with the partnership of an incredible group of dedicated individuals in the department this will be done.

I make that promise, and I am prepared to be measured by it. I will make one more although I've already made this one. If you need services, you will get services. End of story, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I did receive a few notes. There is no set time limit that I'm aware of for ministerial statements. The tradition is typically observed as being about five minutes. This one went on for about 11 minutes, so you might want to visit that, hon. members. It's all very serious stuff, so we allowed it to go on. Please, let's keep that in mind for future reference.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, a point of clarification under section 13 of the standing orders. I would just like to know for future reference how much time the opposition will have to give responses. If it's a five-minute statement, do we get five minutes to respond?

The Speaker: Thank you. I'm sorry. It doesn't work that way, hon. member, but I will clarify this a little bit further, just at the end of this.

Let's just move on and hear the statement from Calgary-Shaw in response.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister, for attempting to clarify what your planned reforms to PDD funding will mean. Unfortunately, I don't believe this statement provided any clarity at all, and it's an unfortunate reality that the minister felt that he needed to deliver this ministerial statement at all.

The minister's remarks must be understood in the context of the fear and anxiety many Alberta PDD families have over the impending July 1 transition of services. For months this minister has pushed the transition on those who receive PDD supports from the province with precious little in the way of detail on how it will go. Understandably, Mr. Speaker, this is causing tremendous worry for families of vulnerable individuals who have come to rely on these supports. In many cases these supports are what allowed them to thrive. I can't tell you how many Albertans I've talked to who are terrified of what this government's ill-defined transition plan will mean for their loved ones or how many front-line employees would gladly forgo their so-called wage increases to ensure that those they care for daily do not have their supports cut.

While attempting to reform the system to serve clients better is a worthy pursuit, doing so with blinders on, as this government is doing, is a recipe for disaster. Mr. Speaker, this minister talks about the ongoing assessments based on the supports intensity scale – an interview based on hypothetical scenarios – and how those outcomes will determine what supports an individual receives.

3:00

To illustrate just how badly this transition has been handled, PDD families were promised the exact opposite. They were told the SIS assessments would not determine funding for supports. They were assured the SIS was simply a pilot project. My own parents, who help care for my sister, who receives PDD support, were told exactly that. Now here they are along with thousands of other PDD families and caregivers awaiting the results of an interview and finding out which number between 1 and 7 they will be assigned to determine which supports they will get. [interjections] Minister, you are reducing people's lives to a number between 1 and 7, and for some unexplainable reason, you don't see a problem with that.

Mr. Speaker, this PDD transition is simply following in the footsteps of so many PC policy failures. It has been underconsulted, poorly communicated, and rushed ahead despite warnings and red flags from everyone impacted. It is government knows best at its worst, and this time it's hitting our most vulnerable.

I along with many Albertans was hoping to hear something more substantive from the minister today. I was hoping for some long-promised clarity and solid evidence that supports will not be lost, as the minister so often likes to remind us. Instead, I suppose Albertans will just simply have to take his word for it. But given what this government's word has meant of late, I'm sure you can forgive them for being a little skeptical.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, ministerial statements and responses to ministerial statements are similar to private members' statements. It's not customary to heckle each other during them, and it's certainly not customary to interrupt them when they're being delivered. If we could please remember that, that would be helpful.

Secondly, I've received a request from the third and fourth parties to join in this discussion and to offer their brief comments. That requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It has become a recurring theme with this government to act first and deal with unanticipated effects as they arise, from dramatic health care changes to an adequate seniors care policy to First Nations policy and now to persons with developmental disabilities. Decisions are made without proper research, consulting, and review of best practices.

Then a critical piece, Mr. Speaker, examining the process of change, change that will minimize the pain of change. This government is now trying to placate PDD clients, their families, and service providers with half-truths and assurances that everyone will be better transitioning to a new needs-based service delivery model with a "greater focus on achieving positive outcomes." I ask you: positive for PDD clients and their families or positive for this province's bottom line? Why can we not in 2013 learn from the boom-bust nature of our economy and provide stable, sustainable support for essential human and government services?

Our most vulnerable have been speaking out loudly and clearly for decades. They are fearful because of this government's erratic and inadequate supports. They are jaded because they have faced a chronic shortage of service. They are tired of not being consulted. They are angry when not having their concerns heard and acted upon. The Alberta Association for Community Living, Alberta Council of Disability Services, and Alberta Disability Workers Association have all joined together against these rapid and dramatic changes.

Make no mistake; this new service delivery model will negatively impact PDD clients and their families in real ways, ways that the rest of us have no understanding of. The least our government can do is ensure stable and dependable funding, proper consultation, and careful, thoughtful implementation of change to improve care for all vulnerable people. Persons with developmental disabilities deserve the very best we can give, and they're not getting it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the New Democratic opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the minister has taken the time to try and offer additional information to explain the rationale behind his draconian cuts to services for people with development disabilities. However, his statement is profoundly disappointing.

First of all, he refers to the supports intensity scale as somehow demonstrating that a whole bunch of people are receiving services that they don't need. However, I must remind members of this Assembly that over two years ago when I first raised the impact of the SIS, I was assured by at least one and possibly two different ministers that this new assessment tool would not be used to cut services to people who currently receive them. I was also assured

that the limits imposed by IQ tests would be removed at the same time that the SIS was implemented.

It is now very clear that these assurances amount to yet another broken promise by this PC government. Indeed, this government started by cutting services. They did so when they chose to take at least \$42 million out of the budget for PDD. Let us be very clear, Mr. Speaker. The minister continuously tries to confuse the issue by suggesting that because his overall budget went up ever so slightly, he is not reducing services. This is simply not accurate. His budget went up for two reasons. First, he needed to fund his partially kept promise to increase salaries for front-line workers. Second, he needed to find \$10 million extra to fund his arbitrary decision to close Michener Centre.

Once those two new expenses are factored out, his ministry actually lost money, a lot of money, and this money is coming at the expense of community access support. The notion that you can somehow increase community inclusion through employment while cutting half the money that would assist in this revised focus is ludicrous, Mr. Speaker, and the minister knows it.

In addition, the minister suggests that another rationale for cutting this community access by almost half is that there are a whole bunch of other disabled Albertans who do not receive funding through PDD. Now, this is absolutely true. But if this was actually an issue about redistributing the resources more equally among a larger number of eligible Albertans, then the money would not have come out of the system. It would not have been cut. Indeed, if equal access to resources was really the issue, Mr. Speaker, funding for PDD would be increasing, not decreasing. Yet it did decrease by at least \$42 million.

As I stated last week, in some areas it looks like the cuts may be even greater than was initially predicted. The Alberta Council of Disability Services said that the total cuts to the northeast region are close to \$9 million out of a total budget of \$23 million. If these cuts were just to community access, the number would have been closer to \$2 million. Instead of just having a 40 per cent cut to community access, the northeast is facing a 40 per cent cut to their whole budget. These cuts mean that not only will Albertans with disabilities in the northeast region lose support to attend community programs but many will lose essential services. Some high-needs individuals will be losing necessary one-on-one staff support, and others will lose residential care or overnight staff support as organizations lay off nearly half of their staff.

These are draconian. The government needs to do the right thing. They need to restore trust and funding . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Speaker's Ruling Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: I want to provide just a little bit of clarification to what's just occurred here regarding Ministerial Statements. I want to refer you, first of all, to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, starting on page 443, where under Guidelines it reads the following.

During "Statements by Ministers", Ministers are expected to make brief and factual statements on government policy or announcements of national interest. Members speaking on behalf of parties recognized by the House are normally the ones who speak in response to a Minister's statement. However, with the unanimous consent of the House, independent Members have been allowed to respond. In responding to the statement, Members are not permitted to engage in debate or ask questions of the Minister. The length of each response may not exceed the length of the Minister's statement; Members who exceed this

length are interrupted by the Speaker. The rules provide no explicit limitation of time allotted to the Minister or the overall time to be taken for these proceedings, although the duration of the proceedings can be limited at the discretion of the Chair.

It goes on, and then it closes by saying:

It is customary as a courtesy for Ministers to advise opposition critics in advance of their intention to make a statement in the House. However, should no such warning be given, custom does not prohibit a Minister from making a statement.

Now, that's according to the guidelines of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

3:10

However, it has been a long-standing tradition in this House for the many, many years that I as Speaker can remember, both as a minister and a private member, that ministers typically, when they request to give a minister's statement, deliver it in that sort of five- or six-minute time frame as a rule. Then the lead critic for the Official Opposition has usually delivered a response within a convention of three minutes. That's been the understanding. Then if there are third and fourth parties in the House, they can certainly request unanimous consent to deliver what has usually amounted to about a one-minute response.

Now, there are variations to that. Sometimes it's two minutes and so on. But in having observed this over the years, many of them are delivered in one minute. When you add all of that up – five minutes on the part of a minister, three minutes on behalf of the Official Opposition, and then one to two minutes or thereabouts for third and fourth parties – it comes to about 10 or 12 minutes, not 20 or 21 minutes, as we've seen today.

Again, it's a very sensitive issue, but typically when ministers get up to speak on issues, they're always sensitive and important issues, and they're just as important to opposition members. Nonetheless, I would ask you to please try and abide by the long-standing tradition of the House, which is somewhere in the neighbourhood of the minutes that I've just given, and as chair I will do my best to try and enforce that going forward.

The Speaker: The leader of the New Democrat opposition.

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Mason: Yes. Under Standing Order 13(2) I would like to request an explanation. Given that the minister was allowed to go on for 11 minutes without interference from the chair, my first question is: why, then, was the member from the fourth party cut off when she had not even reached half that length of time? I don't know the exact time, but it certainly wasn't 11 minutes.

Secondly, with respect to the time limits that you've just indicated, could we see some citations or precedents for that so that we could know where that came from?

The Speaker: Well, with respect to the first question, hon. member, I've already addressed that. The minister who delivered the statement was here when I first commented on it, and I'm sure that he will read what I just said now, when I spoke for a second time on the matter.

Now, there is no hard-and-fast rule that says that a minister can only speak for this many minutes. We don't have a rule like that, hon. member, and everyone here knows that. Similarly, when the Official Opposition rises to speak, it's a matter of convention, usually, that it has been a three-minute response, but there's nothing in our standing orders dictating that either. Then when we get to the third and fourth parties, who wanted unanimous consent

to speak today, there's nothing in the rules that says that it has to be one minute or two minutes or three minutes. But the general rule overarching all of that is that none of the responses from the opposition should exceed three minutes, and that's why the bell rang when the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was speaking.

This is another area that House leaders might want to address. I've read to you the citation that I had from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. If you followed that one, then equal time would be given to opposition members. If the minister here speaks for 10 minutes, then you might be welcome to speak for 10 minutes as well. But the convention of this House has been to limit opposition comments to three minutes. That has been the long-standing practice.

As such, that matter is now clarified and closed. But I do invite the House leaders to again address a number of these housekeeping issues.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Pursuant to 13(2) one very quick follow-up question. You talked about the different conventions, and you talked about how there had been a breach of conventions by different parties. It had always been my understanding that there was another convention, that decisions are to be distributed equally. I'm just curious as to why the remedy of cutting off a speaker was not applied equally to all speakers who may have breached . . .

The Speaker: It does, hon. member. I've already clarified that. Sit down, please.

I've already clarified that, hon. member. Now I've invited you as a House leader to meet with other House leaders and the Government House Leader and talk about that. If you want to put in place a rule with specific time limits, then I invite you to do that. Otherwise, I've read you the citation that I have been following, and that closes the matter. If you wish to raise it again in your own ways, then please do so. Otherwise, I will enforce it as has been the convention of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for a member's statement, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Significance of Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand today in the House and express my passion and support for postsecondary institutions within our province. Fortunately for Alberta, we are home to a number of first-rate institutions of higher education, some of which are internationally renowned.

There are countless ways in which our halls of learning benefit us. The University of Alberta, my alma mater, for instance, is home to a number of first-rate programs, including the Alberta School of Business, that continue to lead the world in groundbreaking research and in producing some of the most highly trained professionals in the world. The Faculty of Engineering, for example, is able to claim a good deal of credit for the prosperity of our oil and gas industry and is helping to lead the way in finding innovative ways of limiting our environmental footprint.

No less important is the intrinsic value to be drawn from pursuing an education for its own sake. It's no mystery that an educated citizenry is a thoughtful, active, and engaged citizenry. That is precisely what our province needs going forward and growing forward. We have cultivated some of the best professors and continue to attract experts from around the globe. However,

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we need to adapt, enhance, and grow to ensure we continue to have world-class postsecondary choice. This is why I'm confident that by fostering the growth of our postsecondary institutions and encouraging Albertans to take advantage of opportunities to develop their skills, talents, and minds, we contribute to ensuring a strong and vibrant future for Alberta.

We have a strong tradition of world-class education, cutting-edge research, and strong graduation rates. Because of this, I am very excited about our province's future in postsecondary education, and I'm confident that this tradition of excellence will continue for many years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Labour Negotiations with Teachers

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for all you do.

It looks like we are finally on the verge of a teacher deal in the great province of Alberta. Now, this is good, and I know that every Member of this Legislative Assembly would agree with that. Certainly, every parent wants what's best for our kids and labour stability in education. How we got to this point, though, Mr. Speaker: this is a serious issue. You see, March 15 the government held a press conference to announce a much-needed victory. The problem is that they really were spiking the football before they were in the end zone.

There are 62 elected school boards in Alberta, and they did not see that contract proposal until the day the government announced it. No wonder there is push-back from boards. They are elected officials, and they are a valuable partner in public education. As such, they ought to be part of the process. They are right to have raised this issue. Now, nearly all of them have signed on the dotted line at this point but many of them begrudgingly so. I have spoken to many of them. Many of them are saying that they are scared of possible ramifications if they did not. That's not exactly cultivating a good relationship going forward.

Now, teachers will be taking a wage freeze for three years. I applaud their commitment to the province of Alberta for doing so. There was initially some resistance on that front, and seeing as the government did not campaign on that, I think we can understand why. They waited until after the election to announce it, not to mention the fact that they wouldn't be honouring their promise of predictable, long-term, stable funding.

The minister says that the bargaining process is broken, and on that point I think he might be right. But what he failed to point out is that his government created this bargaining process. When it comes to accepting responsibility and being accountable for your actions, a former teacher of mine used to remind me and other students of this, and I think it applies. If the shoe fits, wear it. We might have a deal, but as much as the minister owns it, he has to own what has happened up to this point as well.

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

Tartan Day

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize that April 6 was Tartan Day. Tartan Day celebrates people of Scottish heritage. It brings attention to their accomplishments and contributions to sports, science, technology, and the economy of Alberta.

On April 6, 1320, the declaration of Arbroath was signed, and thus Scotland was declared an independent and sovereign state. The declaration urged acceptance to the Pope not to take the English claim on Scotland seriously, and thus Scotland's freedom was recognized.

3:20

Here in Canada the Scottish influence on our democracy is clear. Alberta was settled by pioneering Scots like North West Mounted Police Colonel Macleod and Colonel Irvine. Also of Scottish descent were our first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, and Alberta's first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, as were both the first mayors of Calgary and of Edmonton.

In light of these significant past contributions made by the Scots to the present-day province of Alberta, I hope all members will join me in paying a belated tribute to Tartan Day, celebrated on April 6.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Cuts to Health Care Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning we heard that half of the palliative home-care nurses in Calgary are being laid off. This means that services for people needing end-of-life care in Calgary will be drastically affected. It's a direct hit to the quality of care that we give to the elderly and the sick in this province. There will only be one nurse on call in the evening for all Calgary patients.

These cuts are just the latest in a series of layoffs and service cutbacks to health care in our province. There are layoffs or impending layoffs in community care, speech pathology, interpretation services, and laboratory services. All of these cuts belie the Premier's campaign promise that there would be no service cuts. Mr. Speaker, Albertans who need health care deserve much better than this. The government has been trying to sell Albertans on their claim that the effects of this budget on crucial services like health care and education will be minimal. That's simply untrue.

The loss of 40 jobs in Calgary for palliative care nurses is the drastic result of this government's broken-promise budget, and it takes comfort and quality of life away from dying Albertans. Cutting laboratory services in Westlock, Vermilion, and Wainwright is another broken promise, leading to reduced services for rural Albertans. Because of increased wait times for blood test results, stroke patients might be sent to Edmonton in an ambulance for treatment.

This PC government is cutting health care for Albertans instead of asking the wealthiest Albertans to pay their fair share in taxes. This government is taking care away from the elderly and the sick. Albertans were promised more, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans deserve better. It's clear the only way that they're going to get it is to elect an NDP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, unless my notes are incorrect, we have two more members to speak, but I only show one at the moment. That's Calgary-Shaw. Is there a second member? There isn't? Okay.

Let's go on with Calgary-Shaw as the final speaker for today, then.

Trust in Government

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we wind down this spring session, mercifully for the members opposite, Albertans are learning that there is even more scandal and incompetence plaguing this PC government than anyone could have originally thought. We've seen promise after promise broken and scandal after scandal unfold. This government's credibility has been taking a beating and with it their approval rating.

But with everything we've seen in the last two months, I have to ask: is it any wonder? Is it any wonder Albertans don't trust this PC government to manage their finances when they've plunged Alberta back into debt after promising to balance the books? Is it any wonder Albertans don't trust this PC government to administer justice in a timely manner when the system they have created has delayed court cases involving serious crimes for so long that the accused is able to walk free? Is it any wonder Albertans don't trust this PC government to manage their education when they've delivered some of the most heavy-handed cuts to the postsecondary system Alberta has ever seen after promising not to balance the budget on the backs of students?

Is it any wonder Albertans don't trust this PC government to manage their health care when they lost the support of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, caregivers, and have allowed health bureaucrats to make off with millions and millions of taxpayer dollars in undeserved bonuses? Is it any wonder Albertans don't trust this PC government to uphold the principles of good ethics when the Premier herself refuses to release information about millions of dollars paid out to insiders after promising to restore transparency to her office?

Broken promises, Mr. Speaker. This isn't rumour or imagination or fearmongering. These are facts, and this is just how bad it's gotten. This is not what Albertans voted for in 2012, and if this PC government won't hold itself to account, I look forward to Albertans showing them what accountability looks like in 2016.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, do you have a petition to present?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that calls on the government to increase postsecondary funding rather than drastic cuts to colleges and universities. I have a tabling of 1,377 signatures today.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Minister of Justice, did you have a notice of motion?

Mr. Denis: Yes.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, sir. I rise today to give oral notice of the following government motion:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 22, the Aboriginal Consultation Levy Act, being a money bill, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which

time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Bill 26 Assurance for Students Act

Mr. J. Johnson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act.

This legislation will make the framework agreement that this government presented to the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association earlier this year, which was presented after two years of negotiations and which has since overwhelmingly been supported, binding on all school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Crown, and the Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, when I say overwhelming support, I mean it. Over 96 per cent of Alberta teacher locals voted to ratify, and all but one of our 62 school boards supported the agreement. However, the current framework, because of our bargaining structure, requires unanimous support to proceed. Therefore, in the interests of Alberta's 600,000 students and their parents as well as the vast majority of school boards and teachers across the province who supported the agreement, we are introducing the Assurance for Students Act. This agreement is good for kids, and that has to be our number one priority.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 26 and ask the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have several tablings of returns and reports today, so I'll ask you to please be brief.

Let's have a demonstration by Edmonton-Calder on how that works. You have some tablings today?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I do, and I'm glad to be an example of a good example, Mr. Speaker.

I have the appropriate number of copies of a tabling. It's like a petition, but it's done in their own way, 1,560 signatures demanding the government keep the Michener Centre open to vulnerable Albertans. This is one of many, many piles of these that I have to table.

The second one, I have the appropriate number of copies of a CBC news investigation with supporting documents outlining the allegations against the MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Is that it, Edmonton-Calder? Just those two?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's correct.

The Speaker: I had you listed for four or five.

Let us move on, then, to Calgary-McCall, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five requisite copies of National Freedom of Information Audit 2012, which I mentioned in the questions I asked during question period.

I've got one more here. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of the press release issued by the United Nurses of Alberta regarding the layoffs of palliative care nurses. Heather Smith, the Alberta UNA president, has written a letter to the Alberta Health Services president and CEO, Chris Eagle, requesting an immediate itemization of all the upcoming layoffs and other anticipated changes due to these staffing changes.

I also have five copies of petitions asking the Alberta government to keep Michener Centre open. It's done in such a way, Mr. Speaker, that it has been signed by thousands of Albertans. The Michener Centre has been a home to vulnerable Albertans with severe developmental disabilities for decades. This document shows the support from Albertans across the province. They want to keep the Michener Centre open.

Thank you.

3:30

The Speaker: Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Three tablings today, Mr. Speaker. The first is from a constituent, Tyler Stephenson, a PhD candidate in chemical and materials engineering, who writes to express his concern over government cutbacks to education. He is a born-and-bred Albertan. His family is the second generation to run a cattle ranch in High River. He wants to point out that the lack of government funding for education is directly affecting his research progress and that he is an individual who falls well into the category of people the government wants working for them. This wise investment is going off the rails. That's the first one.

The second one is a report from the fabulous Edmonton-Centre constituency office with a copy of an Internet mailing campaign to councillors and MLAs in support of the city of Edmonton's upcoming application for a municipal sustainability initiative grant for Edmonton's downtown development. I received 96 e-mails, and I will table my report. You will notice it's not every one of the letters.

The second report from the fabulous Edmonton-Centre constituency office is an Internet letter that is supporting the Downtown Vibrancy Coalition to fund the arena project and kick-start \$3 billion in public and private investment. Those e-mails were signed and sent by 1,317 people as of yesterday. I will table copies of that letter and the names of people who sent them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies here of a report prepared for the Alberta Market Surveillance Administrator. Specifically, I refer to page 26 in the report and the five major generators controlling the market.

Mr. Speaker, the second report I have is a snapshot from the Power Pool of Alberta of the price of electricity yesterday, May 13, at noon. What's important about this is that it gives the average price for the last 24 hours as \$258 a megawatt. Yesterday's average at noontime was \$234 a megawatt. The seven-day average is running at \$210 a megawatt. The 30-day average is \$225 a megawatt, which equates to roughly just above 25 cents a kilowatt hour real-time price. The difference between myself and the minister – and I don't know if the minister realized it – was that the price he was quoting was 60 to 90 days old in real time.

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

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This actually was a petition, so if it's inappropriate to table it, I'll do it tomorrow.

The Speaker: If it is a petition and it's been vetted as to form past Parliamentary Counsel, then it can be tabled tomorrow during petitions. Thank you.

Are there other tablings? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll make this very quick. The petition that I attempted to put forward on the table yesterday was not to form, so I will table it now. It is 1,560 signatures put together by those who were protesting the closure of the Michener Centre. The requisite copies are here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Hon. members, I don't show any points of order, so let us move on.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

34. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that:

- A. Pursuant to Standing Order 77(2) Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act, may be advanced two or more stages in one day;
- B. 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.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important consideration today. We've seen Bill 26 introduced today for first reading. The Minister of Education had indicated to the House previously, I think during the introduction, that the confirmation of the agreement by all parties was due yesterday, that when the deadline passed at 3 o'clock yesterday, all parties but one school board and two ATA locals had agreed to assent to the agreement, to affirm the agreement.

This bill essentially puts in place that agreement that well over 95 per cent of teachers and well over 95 per cent of school boards agreed to. It's important and timely that it be dealt with quickly. The agreement fails if it's not assented to by all parties. It's important that this bill, which puts that agreement into place, be dealt with by the House expeditiously; therefore, we would request the consent of the House to pass this motion and allow Bill 26 to proceed to second reading today.

The Speaker: Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm not feeling particularly good about this motion. We have the time available to us to go through this bill in the normal sort of way. We have plenty of time here this week. It's not as though suddenly everything will dissolve and be gone if we just use the time normally, as we do with any other bill. I think that we don't see this sort of legislation forcing agreements very often. Since I've had this in my hand from just a moment ago or so, I think it's only fair to all parties considering this legislation, including here in this

Chamber, that we just move through the bill as we normally do with any other bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

Seeing none, to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: I am sorry. Chestermere-Rocky View, did you wish to speak?

Mr. McAllister: Yeah. I may be confused, which happens from time to time, so I beg your forgiveness. For clarity I thought we were putting forth a motion to go to second reading. Is this actually second reading?

The Speaker: This is not a bill, hon. member. This is a motion, and it is debatable. If you wish to speak to it, then I would welcome you to speak to it. The question has been called, however.

Mr. McAllister: No.

[Government Motion 34 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 207

Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, over a year and a half ago I met a wonderful lady at a dinner party. Karen is her name. During our conversation I was told that her liver was slowly failing and that she would eventually require a liver transplant. Without significant improvements to our human donation procurement system and transplantation infrastructure here in Alberta, the likelihood of Karen receiving a liver is slim; in fact, slim to none.

The enlightenment that evening at dinner, Mr. Speaker, about the dire condition of our organ procurement system here in Alberta begs to ask a number of questions, questions of why. Why are there currently 4,000 Albertans on kidney dialysis at a cost of \$60,000 a year per patient? Why do we currently have 672 patients on our most urgent transplant waiting list? Why is it that over the past five years 214 Albertans have died waiting for organs? Why is it that only 8 per cent of people who are donor candidates coming through the emergency room doors actually made it to the donor process?

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I have a quote from Dr. James Shapiro, who is a U of A transplant surgeon. He said in an e-mail, and I quote: the liver waiting list is almost the worst I've known it in 18 years as a transplant surgeon here in Alberta, and our patients die by the day while waiting. Those lucky ones that get transplants are often close to and sometimes almost through death's door, not the perfect time to transplant. The organ donor rates in Alberta are now close to the worst in the country when they used to be one of

the best. This is disgraceful, especially since Alberta has truly flagship programs in all organ systems. We have to be better at organ donation. We need the infrastructure at each and every hospital in Alberta. If a life cannot be saved by maximal medical means, organ donations should be seen as the highest next priority. Unquote.

Mr. Speaker, I along with Karen's good friends and everyone up here in our members' gallery that was introduced earlier have taken on the challenge of doing whatever we can to lobby whomever we can to give Karen and her family hope and to give hope to the thousands of other Albertans who are battling life-threatening organ failures.

I've talked about the issue of organ donation here in the Assembly on many occasions, sounding like a broken record to a number of you, I'm sure. I've had a number of members' statements, numerous questions to the hon. minister, and many presentations to caucus and to committee. There have also been many attempts made in the past here in the Assembly to improve our human organ procurement system. Back in April of 2000, for example, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek chaired the Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation. It is a wonderful piece of work. I know that Dr. Norman Kneteman was a member of this committee as well. I thank you and the doctor for such wonderful work here back in 2000, yet it was put on the shelf until I dusted it off. It has been a huge resource for me, so thank you, hon. member.

In 2004 a past MLA, Mr. Ron Liepert, who was a private member at the time, brought forward a private member's bill regarding the opt-out clause with respect to organ donation rather than the opt-in. It didn't go too far, Mr. Speaker. The current Edmonton-Manning MLA just last year, in 2011, passed a private member's bill. It was Bill 201, the Health Insurance Premiums (Health Card Donor Declaration) Amendment Act, 2011, allowing individuals who wished to donate organs upon death to sign the back of their Alberta health cards. Great work, and I applaud the member, but Bill 207 will significantly expand on that initiative.

Two weeks ago, as we all know, Mr. Speaker, I introduced a private member's bill, Bill 207, and now, thankfully, it has been converted to a government bill. So I thank all of my government colleagues, and I thank the hon. minister and the Premier for their support in converting this to a government bill, hoping that it will expedite the process of getting this bill through. I want to thank opposition members as well, my opposition colleagues, for their support. I assume I have their support. I guess I will find out here sooner rather than later.

But I especially want to thank the many people in the transplant community – the Dr. Knetemans, the Dr. Lori Wests, the Dr. Atul Humars out there, Dr. James Shapiro, of course – for the wonderful work that they do at the University of Alberta hospital, and all of the patients that I've interviewed. I've interviewed a number of patients waiting for the gift of life. It's heart wrenching, Mr. Speaker. I've talked to many organ recipients as well, on a happier note, Mr. Robert Sallows being one of them. I've introduced him here in the Assembly, a young fellow who had a double-lung and heart transplant, a good friend of mine. I want to thank all of the people and organizations who have provided me with valuable information, guidance, and advice on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in first reading, Bill 207 deals with the establishment of a corporation in Alberta to be known as the Alberta organ and tissue donation agency. The agency's objectives would be to plan, promote, co-ordinate, and support all activities relating to the donation of human organs and tissues for transplant here in Alberta, including activities relating to education and research in connection with the donation of organs and tissues.

The Alberta organ and tissue donation agency would co-ordinate and support the work of designated hospitals, specifically ICUs and emergency rooms, around the province in connection with donation and transplant and also manage the procurement, the distribution, and the delivery of organs and tissues. The agency would be responsible for the managing of waiting lists and establishing a system to fairly allocate the organs and tissues that are available and establishing and managing an Alberta electronic donation registry and creating a robust awareness campaign around that registry.

Other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, such as British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Ontario all have registries. Ontario's Trillium Gift of Life is the only government agency that we have for organ procurement here in Canada, and it should be a template for us here in Alberta. There has been a dramatic increase in organ and tissue donation in Ontario since its establishment.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I propose in the bill that Alberta drivers have the option to express on their drivers' licences their willingness to donate upon death.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many people, including myself, who are extremely passionate about improving the donation rate of human organs here in this province. Not only do we need to get this bill passed here in the Assembly but to move forward and establish this agency. We must act now. Our government is acting now, and I thank the hon. member again, the Minister of Health, for all his work. I look forward to the debate on this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is indeed a pleasure to stand up again on the importance of human tissue and organ donation. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills. I have a huge amount of respect for this particular member. As a former member of the government I have learned to listen to this particular member because he's very passionate and stands up for what he believes in. What's bothersome to me – and the Member for Calgary-Foothills alluded to it in his speaking notes – is: why, why, and why all of these things that he wants to bring forward haven't been done?

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me give you a lesson, a little trip down memory lane. In 1999 I brought forward a private member's bill. The member alluded to it. From there the Premier of the day, Premier Klein, asked me to chair a committee. A Framework for Action: A Coordinated and Integrated Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplant System for Alberta was the report of the Alberta Advisory Committee on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation. The member alluded to this, and he spoke about the good doctor up in the gallery and the many, many people that spent hundreds of hours with me on this particular report. It was a framework for action and what needs to be done to improve organ donation and transplant and all the things that had to be done to make organ donation successful.

I honestly sometimes don't know what the government does with reports. I think they have a separate building somewhere in this province where they take all these reports. If they like them, they go to one place, and if they don't like them or they want to do something with them later, they go into this building that nobody knows about and they collect dust. The Member for Calgary-Foothills alluded to the dust that he probably had to wipe off on this report.

3:50

Then we had a bill come forward with the hon. Member for Calgary-West, I believe, a former minister of Energy and Education, who's not a member anymore. That was former member Mr. Liepert, and he was sitting at that particular time as a private member.

We had another bill on organ donation that actually was well read in the Assembly, and it was called the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act. We've spent a couple of hours, research has, and I want to give credit to my researcher James Johnson, who has worked his little buns off to collect some of this material and provide us with some information. That was the next report.

Then we came in with Bill 201, the Health Insurance Premiums (Health Card Donor Declaration) Amendment Act, 2011, from the Member for Edmonton-Manning. Vigorous debate again. Vigorous acceptance in this Assembly. That was April 29, 2011.

Now it is 14 years later, and we're still having the same debate, once again with what started off as the private member's bill called Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, from the Member for Calgary-Foothills. We've recently been notified that we've changed it to a government bill. Well, thank the Lord for that. Maybe, just maybe, we'll get some action in regard to the government realizing the importance of organ donation and transplantation.

All of us in this Assembly can talk about people we've met who were waiting for organ donation. I had a cousin – notice I said had – who was waiting for a double transplant, and she's no longer with us. It was just that one unfortunate circumstance where to be a recipient of the transplant, someone else had to be able to donate. We've heard thousands of stories in regard to thousands of people who are waiting for organ donation and transplant, and we have heard hundreds of stories about those lucky enough to receive a transplant.

I recall watching the news a few weeks ago in regard to a very tragic incident. Out of that tragic, tragic incident six lucky Albertans are here today because they were recipients in an incident where the family thought – and I don't exactly know the details on this – about the wishes of that particular individual. It comes to mind that the parents at a very, very difficult time decided that they were going to donate the organs so someone else could enjoy them.

I guess for me – it's May 14, 2013; fourteen years later we're still talking about this – I would like to have some reassurance from the Minister of Health on when he's going to proclaim this and give this bill royal assent. We've all seen how long bills can sit without receiving royal assent. I know the Member for Calgary-Foothills very well and alluded to the fact that I like him very much. I have a deep respect for him, and I actually trust him. I do honestly believe that he's going to be a little bit of a pit bull in regard to making sure that the Minister of Health gets this bill through the process so that it receives royal assent.

I have looked at this bill, and I think it captures some of the things. I'm going to continue to work with the Member for Calgary-Foothills to make sure that this bill doesn't get caught up in the bureaucracy of Alberta Health Services and does what it's intended to do, set up an organ donation line.

It's interesting. I found it absolutely fascinating today as I was doing a brief amount of research. I went to the Alberta Health Services website, pressed a button, and I ended up at the Canadian Transplant Association, I think it was, or the CST, whatever that is. I'm thinking: well, why am I going there when I'm trying to check on something that's happening in Alberta? So there are

many, many things that obviously need to be fixed in regard to what the web page shows for just Alberta alone.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to spend a lot of time on this bill because I have spent thousands of hours standing up on this both as a member of the government and as a member of the opposition. I have absolutely pages and pages and pages of *Hansard* from when I've spoken in support of organ and transplant donation starting back from 1998, for goodness' sake. I could read into the record some of the things from when I introduced this bill on March 18, 1998, and it goes all the way through to what I said on April 11, 2011, on this organ and transplant issue. I don't need to tell anybody in this Assembly and, for that matter, any doctors and people that work in this how I support this bill.

I am going to leave the members of this Assembly with the same words that I said in 1998 and again in – I don't know; it just goes on and on – 2011. "Don't take your organs to heaven; heaven knows we need them down here."

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's both a privilege and an honour for me to stand and speak today in support of Bill 207. Of course, my first duty and a pleasure this afternoon is to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for his leadership in bringing this bill forward. There are many other people to thank, and I hope to get to that through the course of these brief remarks. This legislation is of vital importance in Alberta for many reasons that have already been stated. It has my support as Minister of Health and the support of many people directly affected by the need for organ and tissue transplants in Alberta.

I note that you, Mr. Speaker, and this Assembly welcomed a host of public supporters in the members' gallery when Bill 207 was introduced for first reading. Physicians in this province were among those who first showed their support, including a transplant cardiologist at the Stollery children's hospital. Among those who came to support Bill 207 were people who received or were here on behalf of people who have received hearts, kidneys, livers, and lungs. Some have been living with these donated organs for more than 20 years. They're raising families, they're running businesses, they're holding down jobs, and they're contributing in huge ways to leading their communities. Most importantly, they are advocating for an increased focus and allocation of resources to support organ and tissue donation in this province. For that I most humbly thank them.

One supporter was a willing kidney donor known to everyone in this House. These people were here on their own initiative, and many were here as representatives for their organizations. I want to name them once again, Mr. Speaker: the Canadian Liver Foundation, the Canadian Transplant Association, Goodhearts Mentoring, the Alberta Transplant Association, and the Alberta Donates Life Coalition.

I think the question before us, Mr. Speaker, is: what would bring so many people from across Alberta to the members' gallery to show their support for Bill 207? It's because they know first-hand that organ and tissue donation is a life-saving gift that they want others to benefit from. It's because they know first-hand that these gifts of life are also gifts of health and they are gifts of service back to their own communities. That means these gifts of organs and tissues benefit all of the people of our province.

So many people came to show their support because this bill will establish a long-awaited Alberta organ and tissue donation agency. That agency would become the Alberta leader in plan-

ning, promoting, co-ordinating, and supporting activities relating to organ and tissue donation. It would manage the procurement, the distribution, and the co-ordination of delivery of organs and tissues. It would co-ordinate and support the work of designated facilities in connection with donations, and it would be responsible for managing wait-lists for transplants that will oversee a fair allocation of available organs and tissues.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, as has been stated by many members in this House and most recently by the hon. member opposite, there are many colleagues in this Assembly, present and past, who have advocated for further work and emphasis on organ and tissue donation in our society. I'm pleased to join my colleague in acknowledging the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and, most particularly, acknowledging the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who began leadership on this issue long before I and others had the opportunity to serve in this House. Most importantly, I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for having the willingness to bring this issue to a head, so to speak, in our province, to challenge us in our thinking not only about the mechanics of organ and tissue donation, the need for an online registry, but the need for a very real and substantive discussion in our society about a critically important issue that we have ignored for too long.

On the public awareness front the new agency under the leadership of the Ministry of Health will educate the public on matters related to organ and tissue donation and help others to provide education. It will provide valuable advice both to me and to any future Minister of Health on this very important issue.

I know that advocates, Mr. Speaker, have long been asking for an Alberta organ and tissue donation registry. The new agency, that I mentioned earlier, would manage such a consent-to-donate registry that would establish information-sharing agreements with relevant agencies in Alberta and beyond our borders and conform to legislation consistent with Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the online registry, which is something that we hope to have up and running very soon after the hopeful passage and proclamation of this bill, there are many opportunities to build upon successes that already exist in Alberta. We were the first in Canada to have an electronic health record, Alberta Netcare. We are among the first to have and will soon be announcing further enhancements to the personal health portal, which is the portal that allows Albertans to receive information about health and health care and very soon will allow them to view information about their own health.

Both of these vehicles are going to be absolutely critical in our ability to make Albertans' intent to donate easier to register, to do so online, and to hopefully have that information linked to their electronic health record so that at the time of need the intent to donate and the other relevant consents that are required can be more easily accessed by our health care professionals. By making it easier for people to register their intent to donate and by raising awareness of the need, we can dramatically increase organ and tissue donations across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I think the statistics in our province bear repeating, and I hope Albertans will take note. The province's decreased organ donation rate was 16 to 17 donors per million population from 1995 until 2005. By 2011, for reasons that I think we need to discuss in the course of debate on this bill, the rate had dropped to 5 to 7 donors per million population. This compares to 16.3 donors per million population in Ontario and to 11.8 donors per million in British Columbia in 2011.

Mr. Speaker, I know and I believe that most members of this House will also know and will attest that Albertans would be well served by an agency dedicated to increasing organ and tissue donations to help others locate and receive the organs and tissues they need to live healthy and productive lives. Through public education Alberta's innovative tissue and organ donation agency will have a positive and profound impact on provincial and national donor rates that will help save lives. By supporting research, it will establish Alberta as a leader in transplant medicine.

Bill 207 makes all of that possible, Mr. Speaker, but what it also does in a very significant way – again, my thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for his leadership – is that it serves as a call to action for all of us in this House and all us who are citizens of this province to set the stage to increase those organ and tissue donation rates, to dedicate public resources to better sourcing and supply of organs and tissues, and, most of all, to appeal to what I think is a very real sense of responsibility on the part of Albertans to use their gifts to help make life and quality of life possible for more and more of us in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks on second reading. I again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for his leadership and for the expected support I hope we will receive from all members of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available, hon. members.

Seeing no one under 29(2)(a), let us move on to Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest in being able to speak to and support Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013. I'm very pleased that we have some forward movement on this important issue here, and I certainly appreciate the Member for Calgary-Foothills doing this work. Good for him.

Now, we know and I think it's been said that across the country organ donation rates have been flat and that particularly in Alberta it's been really on the decline and low. We have reason, I think, to make some amendments to increase this process that we have here in the province. The registry I think is something that the experts have been looking for for a long time, so this is welcome news. We believe that the new agency would be beneficial in helping to co-ordinate activities as well as to raise public awareness, making sure as well, though, Mr. Speaker, that the agency is run in an open and transparent manner and run by experts that would have to be arm's length from the political side of things.

As I go through the bill, I think that, again, there's a great deal of detail that is good. It makes it, I think, to be mandatory for adults to be asked whether or not they will be donors. This is an important thing when you are seeking or renewing an operator's licence. Of course, there are quite a lot of people that don't have a driver's licence, so I was hoping that maybe this provision could in fact extend to everyone who gets photographic identification, not just a driver's licence. The photo ID looks very similar to the driver's licence, so we could probably extend it to that.

Another question I wanted to ask about was providing valid consent through an online registry, that it is not signed by witnessing. I don't understand how this might work. Right now, today, Mr. Speaker, you sign the back of your donor card, right? Living transplants require an additional signature from the donor before any procedure. Deceased donors must have the next of kin sign off. I don't know if the bill actually changes this process or

not. I just wanted to maybe put that into the mix to see if we are streamlining or improving that aspect of the process.

As well, just to put it out there, the organization or the co-ordination of this thing: I'm just wondering if it's going to be subject to performance measures. I'm also curious to know how much this new agency might cost. Those are, I guess, my four or five questions that I'll put to you. In the next 24 hours or so we can work through them.

Again, as I say, Alberta New Democrats certainly support an expanded registry that will allow us to meet the needs of donors and to meet the needs of transplant patients. I think this is an awesome step in the right direction.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing no one under 29(2)(a), let us move on, then, to the Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

4:10

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills for putting this bill forward. It's about time, and good on you for all your hard work.

This bill aims to increase the rate of organ and tissue donation in the province, a commendable goal. This goal is even more vital when we compare Alberta's and Canada's organ and tissue donation rate to the rest of the world. In 2001 Canada's donation rate was 3.5 donors per million. In 2010 the rate had increased marginally to 13.9 donors per million. Despite a continued need, the rate barely changed over the course of a decade.

These rates are not in line with other developed nations. Spain, for example, recorded 32.1 donors per million in 2010. This is a huge shift from 14.3 per million in 1989. Spain's performance shows that progress is possible and that Canada's low performance is not beyond repair.

One of the reasons the Spanish experience has been more successful is because of the switch to opting-out standards of organ donations instead of opting in, but what is more important for Alberta is their expertise in engaging the public, promoting organ and tissue donation, and designing systems to allow for society-wide tracking of consent of donors. Canada's performance lags despite efforts such as the national organ donor week, which was established by federal law in 1997.

Mr. Speaker, this bill aims to establish an Alberta organ and tissue donation agency, superseding current regional efforts to co-ordinate and encourage organ donation. Having a province-wide body to encourage more donors to sign up could help find efficiencies and expand partnerships to encourage organ donation. These centrally co-ordinated promotions could lead to more engagement with potential donors with a similar amount of expended resources.

This ties in to what I view as the more significant portion of this bill, the creation of the Alberta organ and tissue donation registry. This registry aims to simplify the registration of people's consent for organ and tissue donation. In my mind, this would be a great way to ensure that potential donors' wishes are respected. At the very least it's an excellent step forward from our current system of endorsing the back of our Alberta health care card, which many don't realize is there or simply forget. With the establishment of this registry amazing things become possible.

On a personal note, Mr. Speaker, I know first-hand how many amazing things can happen when organ donation is considered. On July 3, 2001, my son Troy was removed from life support after suffering brain damage from a dirt bike accident six days earlier.

Yes, he was wearing the best helmet money could buy. Also, the health care system in this province is second to none. Not once in that week did we as a family ever think he wasn't getting the best care possible thanks to the U of A hospital. Also, the air medevac worked very well in this province.

While many tough decisions had to be made that week, one decision that came without hesitation was to donate Troy's organs. My family is very close. We knew that should anything happen to one of us, giving the gift of life through organ donation would be a given. My son was all about giving. He was training to be a firefighter and dedicated his life to helping others. That's why when we faced the question about donating his organs, my wife, daughter, and I did not hesitate. Because of our family's decision Troy dramatically changed and altered 28 lives for the better. Yes, 28.

We know that a single mom raising a 10-year-old boy on her own received one of his kidneys. Before she received the kidney, she had to go to the hospital for dialysis, bringing her son with her each day. Since her kidney transplant she no longer needs dialysis. Even more importantly, we know that our family has played a part in giving her child his childhood back.

A man in Saskatchewan received Troy's heart, giving him the gift to watch his grandchildren play soccer. One of the first joint liver-pancreas transplants in western Canada was performed using Troy's organs.

If I can leave you with one message today, it would be this. Talking to your family about organ donation is critical. There are many misconceptions about what it involves, but the more you talk, the more you learn. Should what happened to our family ever happen to you or your family, your decision will be automatic. Deciding to be an organ donor is the first big step. Telling your family is the next. Making organ donation top of mind will help it become a more popular choice for all Albertans.

That said, I was pleased to see the section of this bill where the question of opting in as an organ donor would be asked when registering or renewing your driver's licence. I believe the registry and the requirement for stating a preference would greatly increase the awareness of organ and tissue donation along with the opt-in rate. The more people we have donating organs, the more people who can have a chance at life.

What we need is a clear call for action such as, "The next time you renew your licence, give the gift of life" or something similar. Alberta should realize rate gains over the renewal cycle of a driver's licence. I have no doubt that the Alberta organ and tissue donation agency and the Alberta organ and tissue donation registry would be a powerful combination to increase Alberta's organ and tissue donation rates. By reminding Albertans of their important choice about becoming organ donors, there would be increased discussions in families about donation preferences, making end-of-life decisions just a little bit easier.

I miss Troy, but I am grateful for the legacy he left behind. I know that our loss was not for nothing. There are many families who have benefited because of what happened and because of the decision our family made, but I can say for sure, Mr. Speaker, that organ donation is the right thing to do. Weeks and months later I would still think about the recipients, and a smile would come to my face.

Mr. Speaker, I see many benefits to be found in this bill, and I would like to again thank the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this bill forward. I will be voting in support of this bill, and I encourage my colleagues to vote in favour as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, technically. I think the standing ovation that you just received speaks well to 29(2)(a).

Let us move on. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand and speak to this important bill, Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013. My thanks to the Member for Calgary-Foothills for his leadership on this and his tenacity, hard work.

This is going to make the right choice the easier choice. In health we always talk about trying to make the healthy choice the easier choice as a way of changing human behaviour. This is one aspect of human behaviour that hasn't necessarily been tapped appropriately to ensure that we get the most donations, the most awareness, the most support, and the most contributions for this important medical service, that has really revolutionized a lot of health care in the developed world in the last few decades.

4:20

The identification of a new agency, the Alberta organ and tissue donation agency; the importance of co-ordinating and supporting donation organizations that are already out there; educating the public; managing, delivering, and encouraging the use of the online registry; monitoring and measuring the system; and performing other functions are absolutely critical to a kind of cradle-to-grave, if I can use those terms, system that identifies individuals, identifies recipients in a timely way, and makes these organs accessible and healthy in the timely transport and transplant. It's critically important, and I hope this will bring Alberta into a new age relative to the rest of the world, the developed world at least.

Having said that and saying that I fully support this bill, I can't help but take the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to talk about opportunity costs in the health care system and what a difficult challenge this minister has, this government has, all of us have in deciding where health care dollars should go. When so much of what we see in our society is preventable, it's impossible to overlook the fact that we are continuing to pour more and more money into end-stage problems, crises, accidents after they happen. We continue to spend less than 4 per cent of our health budget on prevention, health promotion, and opportunities to reduce the impact. Obviously, we have to address the whole continuum of illness and injury.

I guess I have to say, once again, that we are challenged as a government to recognize there are opportunity costs to investing more and more and more into the issues after the problem has developed. There's no increase in prevention programs in this province. I am aware that roughly 5 per cent of our population consumes close to over 50 per cent of the health care costs. There's a tremendous opportunity for prevention. Whether it's in heart disease, cancer prevention, injury prevention, there are tremendous opportunities that are not being tapped and are hardly being discussed in this Legislature. Maybe they're discussed, but no money follows.

The kind of commitment that I see here, which is laudable for transplant, we also need to see and hear in relation to prevention. The world standards in prevention, which we see in some of the Scandinavian countries and even in some of the developing countries where they recognize they don't have the money for these expensive technologies and important interventions, really should give us pause to look at how much we could be doing in primary prevention in relation to injuries, whether they're injuries

in the home, injuries in the community, sports injuries, motor vehicle injuries, or recreation vehicle injuries.

It takes leadership, and it takes investment. Still in 2013 we spend less than 4 per cent of our massive health care budget on prevention. That should give us serious pause. This is an opportunity, as we look at end-of-life issues and the tremendous expense associated with some of these important but very costly interventions in people's lives, to think also about earlier stages of well-being, community supports for people, psychological supports, mental illness, and some of the opportunities for early interventions in childhood and school that return hugely on human productivity, human well-being, and costs to the health care system.

It's just a reminder, as we debate this very important bill, to acknowledge that we talk about prevention a lot, but we don't do a lot about prevention. In some cases kidney disease and kidney transplants could be prevented if we had better management of high blood pressure, of chronic kidney infections, of some of the chronic conditions that need to be identified through a primary care office and then closely monitored through a primary care office. It's ultimately much less suffering, much less cost, and much greater human potential. Whether it's heart disease, injury, cancer, or infectious diseases with vaccinations, we know that prevention is a tremendous investment.

I just want as a matter of process to remind us all that it's not enough to talk about prevention. We have to start investing some of our multibillion-dollar health care budget in prevention, or we will never deal with the load of demands and possible options that we are increasingly allowed to use. We have the finances and the technology and the science to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seeing none, let us move on to Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, then.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by saying thank you so much to the Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe it is, for bringing this bill forward, Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013. I know that it's been a long process. I was actually surprised to learn, when I was speaking with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, exactly how long that process has taken. She brought it to my attention that she had worked on this bill or a similar bill in 1998 and again in 2011. As we all know, she has been a very active advocate for health. I appreciate the efforts that the Member for Calgary-Foothills has done and the attention and the awareness that you've brought to organ and tissue donation. I also appreciate how dedicated you've been to the process of bringing this forward, and I thank you for that.

I also would like to take a moment to thank the government. I know it doesn't happen often from this side – I know – but Wildrosers always give credit where credit is due. I thank the government for making this a government bill. The reality of it was that when we saw that it was a private member's bill, many of us in our caucus thought it should be a government bill. I'm glad that the government was able to see that that was the right thing to do and were able to kick it up to where it should have been and actually pass it in this session.

I applaud the government for doing the right thing. I applaud the Member for Calgary-Foothills for making it happen. I applaud every single PC member for supporting this bill – I'm assuming it's all of you – and doing the right thing for Albertans. I'm more than willing to give credit where credit is due, and I think today is

one of those days. Thank you very much to each and every one of you.

I'd also like to go even further to say to the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti that what you were just speaking to was incredibly moving, and I thank you for putting a human face on this issue. We stand in the House many times and talk about our personal stories. I'm probably one of the worst offenders for that, and I do it because I wear my heart on my sleeve when it comes to that. To hear your story, I think you really put into perspective exactly why we need to have this discussion with our families. Not any one of us in this House is expecting to go home today and have something happen and have to make that decision. I applaud you and your family. My heart is with you and your family. I thank you for putting a human face to this issue so that we can all understand it better. Thank you very much.

I want to talk a little bit about what this legislation means to us. This legislation will allow Alberta to take a leadership position in organ donation throughout Canada as only Ontario, B.C., and Manitoba have online registries. I'm actually quite excited to see this option come forward as I myself am a donor. I choose to be a donor on the back of my Alberta health care card. I think it's great that the online registry allows us to go in and make a conscious choice, have that choice be noted, and actually allows us to say what we want to happen with our own personal body.

In Alberta there remain several issues with organ donation. We know as of today there are 25 to 40 Albertans who lose their lives every year waiting for organ donations. Now, I have to admit that I personally have not been touched by that situation of waiting for an organ donation. However, I do know members of my own riding, who are constituents, who have brought to my attention their wait period. I know a member of my riding who passed away three years ago. He awaited a heart transplant, received the heart transplant, and unfortunately six months later it was not successful. He passed away. However, his two-year wait for the heart was a very dramatic and very traumatic time for him and his family, so I'm aware of the situation as that goes through.

4:30

We know that over the past five years the numbers are heartbreaking in that there have been about 214 people who have lost their lives waiting for a donation. I can only imagine what it must be like to be that person who's waiting for the call to say, "I have a heart for you; I have eyes for you," you know, whichever. Equally I can only imagine what it must be like to have to make that decision. I can't imagine having to sit with my spouse, if that's my son or daughter or my mom and dad, and having say to somebody else that I know that this can help X number of people. That's why I think it is so important to hear the story of the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and to talk about how difficult that decision was but also talk about all the positive outcomes and to know that as he proceeds through life, he knows that the life of his son lives on in others and all of the good that his son was able to bring to so many other families.

Alberta has the longest wait-list in Canada for cornea transplants. We know that there were about 800 people on that organ donation wait-list in 2011. It would be exciting to see that this online registry would be able to reduce that wait-list. I can only think of the joy it would bring to someone who couldn't see today to then have a cornea transplant and actually be able to see the world in vivid colour like so many of us take for granted.

We also know that the cost to our health care system of having patients wait for organ donations can be extraordinary. The Canadian Institute for Health Information, or CIHI, estimates that the cost of kidney dialysis can be up to \$60,000 per year. Now,

that's just the cost of dialysis. We know that those costs could increase, of course, if they get sick, the longer they wait, all of that. We also know that for many people who are waiting on the wait-list, their health deteriorates. You start off thinking you can get the organ donation, and by the time the organ becomes available, you may or may not be a candidate anymore. That devastation or that triumph for the family would have roller coaster emotions and be very difficult for each and every person in that family.

If we compare the costs of all of these health treatments, the cost of setting up a hundred thousand dollar registry is really quite negligible. You know, a hundred thousand dollars in today's terms is very little money, and if that amount of money can help people get off the registry wait-list and help people to become healthier and more vibrant Albertans and Canadians as a whole, then it's a good investment of our money. It's also the right thing to do.

We can make a difference. I think we heard stories like that today. We heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, who talked about what propelled him to come to this stage and why this is so important to him. We've heard the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who's been advocating for a very similar registry for years. We heard the hon. Minister of Health stand up and speak to this legislation, and I have to say that I applaud him for doing that because I think it's very important when the Health minister takes a personal interest in a health bill, essentially, and basically endorses it. That ensures that Albertans know this is a priority for this government and has the power to actually take it forward and enforce it and provide a solution to many, many Albertans. I'm excited to see what a difference this will make.

It was interesting as I listened to the conversations that we're having in the House today that, you know, we're all very much on the same page. However, I did find it interesting to hear that less than 5 per cent of people donate, and I think a lot of that is just noneducation. I can understand why people fear donation. Not very much is known about it. They worry that there is some sort of other reason that you might want their organs, and I think they worry about harvesting organs, those kinds of things. But that's really not the case here. This legislation really allows people who want that choice to make their choice known and to register to do so.

I can tell you that in my own household we're torn on this decision. When I went back to my constituents about this bill, it was interesting because the majority of my constituents were very much in favour of this bill, and I support it as well. However, my husband does not. My husband does not agree with organ donation, and I'm an organ donor, so that led to a very interesting debate in the home.

Mr. Wilson: Who won?

Mrs. Towle: Well, I will win. I haven't won yet, but I will, and the registry will help me do that.

What I found very interesting was that when I was talking to my husband about this issue and when I was talking to other family members who maybe don't share my enthusiasm for the registry, what I understood and what I realized was that it was really just a nonunderstanding of exactly what this registry was going to do, and there was a fear. There was a fear that for some reason, in some way, somehow that my life, should I be in an accident, or the lives of our children, should they be in an accident of some sort, may be propelled to end early because of organ donation needs. When we had this robust discussion, I basically, you know, put it down to: that's just not the way the system works.

I don't think there's a physician out there who's pushing someone to pass away so they can harvest the organs and get you out of the box sort of thing. My experience with physicians and my experience with front-line caregivers is that they're incredibly sensitive and incredibly aware of the needs of the family during these very, very difficult times. I think they do everything they can to make sure that our wishes are known and that that pressure is not there. But if you do choose to be an organ donor, there are certain timelines. There's a reality there.

It was a very good discussion. Since we were having it, I looped in our 11-year-old at the same time. I figured, you know, I might as well gang up on my husband. As I said, I will get my way at some point. I expressed very clearly to my 11-year-old my wishes and what that meant. It was interesting because she absolutely, one hundred per cent agreed with me and is now working on her dad to support your bill. So I think the fact that we're even having this discussion in households is a huge step forward. I don't know that we were having it before this bill came forward, so thank you.

The other part of that is that I can tell you that when my brother was diagnosed with Huntington's, we went through that discussion with both my mom and dad, but mostly my mom. It was a difficult discussion to have with a mom about a 32-year-old man. The discussion was: how could we help other people given Ron's tragedy and his diagnosis? I can tell you that the information that came to us was great. It was very positive. It was very clinical. My brother had never explicitly said that he wanted to donate his organs, but I knew that once he was diagnosed with Huntington's, he wanted to donate parts of his body for research, which is integral to part of finding a cure. So we went through the process of trying to do that, and we were not able to just because of the nature of his disease. It didn't leave anything for donation, unfortunately. But it was a good exercise for us to go through. It was a traumatic exercise, but it was by our choice, so I think that that was helpful.

I'm glad to see that probably going forward, with the existence of this registry, that direction will be made much more clear to family members. There's one huge advantage to this registry, and that advantage is that your wishes can be made clear. Your wishes can be stated explicitly, that you want to do it. You attach it to your driver's licence, and there's no question. You know, this can be divisive in some families, so that would be very, very positive.

Another positive part of this legislation is that by asking Albertans if they want to join the registry, when they apply for the registry, they can take a proactive step in doing most of the workload to solve the issue of organ donations. They can literally have a one-stop area where they can go. Nobody has to wonder where their health care card is. Nobody has to wonder if this is by choice. They're able to do it at one stop. When they renew their driver's licence, it's a simple: would you like to be a donor or not? Yes or no? If they're not sure, then it's a simple: well, I need to go home and have this chat with my husband or my family. I think that that is very, very positive.

Also, I think with the fact that it's done through the driver's licence, you know it's their consent. It's not what someone else is pushing or what someone else's agenda is. It's their consent. They're making a very clear statement of what they want.

4:40

The only caution I have about this bill is that I hope the government is able to look at other provinces who are already doing this registry and are doing it for a very efficient cost. We know that B.C., for example, is doing it for approximately \$350,000 a year. I only caution you to please be aware so that this doesn't necessarily balloon into a huge bureaucracy. It can easily be

managed. Other provinces are managing it. As I understand it, U of A and Foothills, I think, do offer this service already, so I hope that this government will consult with those who are already doing this.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, the last speaker that I have on the list is from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. The hon. member.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say a few words in support of the bill. I think the notion of the organ registry is a great step forward, but I do want to say that it's not the whole answer. If we really are serious in this House about increasing organ donor rates, we need to go to the next step, and that is presumed consent.

[Ms Pastoor in the chair]

The Minister of Infrastructure mentioned the example of Spain. Spain is one of those jurisdictions that found a marked increase in their organ donor rates when they went to a system of presumed consent. Now, what is presumed consent? Presumed consent is when you're presumed to consent to the donation of your organs after you pass away. That would not take away anyone's individual rights or the freedom to not have your organs donated or to the disposition of your body in whatever manner you saw fit, but it would greatly increase the rates.

There is empirical data that shows that presumed consent will increase organ donor rates by anywhere from 25 to 30 per cent. I just want to mention, Madam Speaker, if I could, some of the countries that already have presumed consent laws. They include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. So this is not a shot in the dark. It's not something that is unknown in other parts of the world.

I would say that if this Legislature at some point wants to take a bold and progressive step towards increasing organ donation rates that we ought to consider bringing in legislation for presumed consent.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. We have 29(2)(a) available.

Are there any other speakers? Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak on Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, and I want to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Foothills for bringing this private member's bill.

The Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill was talking about presumed consent, I believe. You know, I think is a great bill. It's a step in the right direction, and I think we can expand upon this bill. We had a bill like this from the Member for Edmonton-Manning before, so this is a further extension of that. This bill will amend the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act, 2006.

[The Speaker in the chair]

To donate an organ or tissue, one must currently contact the AHS facility in Edmonton or Calgary to start the process and the paperwork. This new agency, the Alberta organ and tissue donation agency, would be created and would report to the Minister of Health. The LG can make regulations regarding the online registry; the information that may be included; its collection, use,

and disclosure; the collection of registry information by Alberta registry agents; and the location of the sticker on one's driver's licence.

As we know, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in 2011 there were 324 Albertans who were waiting for a kidney transplant, 94 people who were waiting for a liver transplant, and 57 more who needed either a single- or double-lung transplant. Another 17 Albertans needed a heart transplant. I know a friend who has been waiting for six years for a liver transplant.

I think that with this bill, you know, there's more education needed. We have to educate more families, more people, more family members. I think that if we could educate more people on this, there would be more people willing to donate. This bill is a good bill. I think this bill will encourage at least, you know, discussion in the family household. I definitely will be talking to my family members when I go back, and we always do this. Some of my friends have already donated for medical research. There's already a dialogue going on that lives can be saved by donating organs. I think the education part is lacking in this. Definitely, this bill will increase the number of donors in Alberta, and it will definitely increase the number of donors which will save lives. No doubt about that.

There are potential privacy issues, you know, with this bill. Every Albertan would be asked at the issuance or the renewal of an operator's licence whether they would like to be a donor. This could cause undue stress and maybe embarrass someone signing up. If people are educated, they will be prepared for this question when they go to renew their licence, and they will be more willing to put their check mark on that. While section 12 of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act provides confidentiality of the information collected, the Privacy Commissioner is not included in the wording of the act or this bill. Most of the information in the registry would be governed by regulation, not by legislation, so there are some privacy concerns here. I think education will be the key in succeeding to get more people to become organ donors.

I congratulate the member for bringing this bill forward. It will definitely help increase the number of donors, and it will definitely, you know, go a long way towards saving more lives, Mr. Speaker. I will be wholeheartedly supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Are there any other speakers?

Would you like to close debate, hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills?

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, all. I thank everyone here for participating today in second reading of this Bill 207. I especially want to thank the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for his heartfelt speech right from the heart. There were some good points made here this afternoon, and I look forward to discussing them in Committee of the Whole. Until then, I would ask to call the question.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 207 read a second time]

Bill 26 Assurance for Students Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to move second reading of Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act.

This legislation reflects the importance that we as government and as a province place on our education system. It also represents almost three years of hard work by the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and many folks inside my ministry. I want to particularly thank Jacquie Hansen, the president of the Alberta School Boards Association, and Carol Henderson, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, for their tireless efforts on behalf of their respective members and on behalf of kids and Albertans, and I thank the staff in my department, that have worked so hard on this.

While we would all have preferred not to have to legislate this, I'm very pleased with the overwhelming support that the framework agreement has received to this date nonetheless.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, 60 of 62 ATA locals along with the provincial ATA executive support the framework agreement that this legislation puts in place. Those locals represent 95 per cent of our teachers across the province, and all but one school board support the agreement. That's 61 of our 62 boards. They support it not because it's the best, the greatest deal ever drafted or because it's perfect or because they don't have reservations with it. They support it because it's good for kids, and they realize that they're not just voting for themselves. They're also voting for all Alberta students. I want to thank them for taking that broad perspective.

This deal offers stability for Alberta families and assurance that school will go on without disruption. It offers cost certainty for school boards, who are doing a great job facing very difficult budgets. It offers workload solutions for our teachers. But most of all it allows all of us – teachers, trustees, government, and parents – the opportunity to focus our efforts for the next four years on making education better for Alberta's kids. Long-term, province-wide labour peace with our teachers has served this province extremely well over the last five years, and this legislation will ensure we continue to benefit from that stability.

We've been able to do a great deal of amazing work in that time. We've been able through Inspiring Ed and through Setting the Direction and Speak Out and other initiatives to reach out and talk to thousands of Albertans and help paint a vision, a picture of what we want this education system to look like well into the future. It was those conversations that led to the development of the new Education Act, that passed in the House last year. It was those conversations that led to the exciting five announcements that we had last week, making some significant changes in our system, taking one of the strongest education systems in the English-speaking world and making it even better, Mr. Speaker. Together with the labour stability that this bill gives us, we'll be able to do even more.

Now that I've outlined where this legislation will allow us to go, let me take a quick moment to step back and remind you where we've come from. Since 2010 the government has been working on a new province-wide deal that would be in the best interests of teachers, school boards, and, most importantly, Alberta's 600,000 students and their parents, and I want to commend the previous two ministers, now the Minister of Human Services and the Deputy Premier, who also worked diligently on these negotiations.

Over that time, Mr. Speaker, our government has made a number of offers to the ATA and to the school boards, offers we believed would have ensured stability in the system and be beneficial. As all of us here know, those several offers were turned down, and work behind the scenes continued to try to get a deal.

For almost three years work continued. We met with the ATA. We met with the ASBA. We met with both of them together. I met with each individual school board, all 62, to hear about what needed to be in place for them for a deal.

All of that work and collective effort went into the offer presented on March 17 of this year, and in spite of reports to the contrary, we presented that framework, that offer on the same day to the Alberta School Boards Association Board of Directors and the Alberta Teachers' Association provincial executive. While the provincial ATA supported the agreement, the ASBA eventually asked for it to go to all boards for consideration. I respect that decision, and that's exactly what we did.

For the last two months, while the provincial ATA took the agreement to their members, my ministry has been working very diligently with boards to get the support needed to make the proposed agreement a reality. As I have said before, I firmly believe that the framework agreement is in the best interest of teachers, school boards, students, and their parents. The agreement would see compensation for Alberta's 40,000 teachers frozen for three years, one of which has almost passed since the end of the previous agreement. That pay freeze will be followed by an increase of 2 per cent in the 2015-16 school year and a one-time lump-sum payment to be funded by government in that same year. This will ensure the cost stability the education system needs in order to focus on students in the classroom, and it also gives school boards certainty on the funding that they need from the province.

Even with three zeros this agreement maintains Alberta's teachers as the best paid among all Canadian provinces, but as the ATA is quick to point out, salary has never been the issue for the teachers this round. Teachers have been concerned about workload, and that's also a central aspect to the agreement this legislation puts in place. The framework agreement requires a school board without hours of instruction restriction in its collective agreement to take steps to bring the number of hours a teacher spends in front of students closer to a provincial threshold of 907 hours per school year. For about 60 per cent of Alberta's teachers this is already in place, so that won't be an issue. It will be a challenge for some of our smaller rural boards – and I recognize that – which is why we allowed time to reach the goal and ways for our small rural schools to be excluded where appropriate.

We're also looking at workload in other ways. We've committed to conduct an internal review in addition to a third-party study that will look at how teacher workloads can be adjusted in the context of the 21st century. Similar reviews will be carried out by each of Alberta's school boards, and the result of these workload reviews will be an improved educational experience for both Alberta teachers and, most importantly, their students.

We've been working hard to get this agreement for the better part of three years. Going back to the drawing board now is simply not an option. Our students, their parents, and, indeed, all parties in the education community simply cannot wait any longer. We must take the necessary steps to ensure and protect the sustainability of our world-class education system. Albertans want the education system to continue to meet the needs of a new generation of learners and bring the vision of Inspiring Education to life, and that can only happen in a stable labour environment. Therefore, in the interests of Alberta's 600,000 students and, like I said, their parents and teachers across the province, I am seeking the support of the Legislature for the Assurance for Students Act.

This legislation will make the framework agreement binding on all school boards, the ATA, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Crown, and the Minister of Education, and this includes the 61 school boards and 60 ATA locals who have

already ratified it as well as the one board and the two locals that did not. Again, Mr. Speaker, I accept that this legislation is by no means an ideal way of concluding labour relations or negotiations, but as Education minister I must put the needs of our students first, and this proposed legislation provides for an outcome that is as close as possible to the actual framework agreement with a couple of minor changes.

The legislation allows for more than one exceptions committee rather than only one three-member committee should they be needed. This is to allow for more quick and efficient decision-making by these important committees and for them to represent both metro and rural perspectives. This is a concern I heard from boards when I met with them to discuss the agreement, and it's a reasonable change, a minor change that will ensure faster decisions and not change the spirit of the agreement.

The legislation also changes the role of the ASBA slightly. While the insight and perspective the ASBA provided over the last several years was invaluable, it became clear that they want us to work more directly with their boards when it comes to labour agreements. That doesn't diminish the critical role they play at all. It simply recognizes and respects their wish to allow local boards to consider what's best for them. I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker, that in this case all but one board decided to support the agreement.

Bill 26 removes the requirements for the ASBA to formally approve the ministerial order about teacher workload, something that has effectively already been done by the acceptance by 61 of the 62 school boards of that memo within the framework over the last several weeks. It also allows me to develop a ministerial order to clarify the role of their organization but only within the context of this agreement should that be needed. Otherwise, the legislation merely implements the deal already agreed to by the provincial executive council of the Alberta Teachers' Association and ratified by 95 per cent of ATA bargaining units and 61 of our 62 school boards. With that much support, it is inappropriate, would not be fair, and shortchanges our students for one board or two locals to obstruct an agreement that has been overwhelmingly approved by so many.

I've said many times, Mr. Speaker, that the bargaining process needs to be fixed – and it does – but I'm not about to do that today without consultation and without those involved: the school boards, the ATA, and, of course, parents. The role of school boards has evolved, and I want to make sure that whatever bargaining structure Alberta may put in place recognizes and respects the critical role that they play and the role the province plays, but for today we need to move forward, and we need to get this deal done. We need to safeguard the education of Alberta kids in a stable and supportive learning environment and help ensure we live within our means, especially given these challenging financial times.

The Assurance for Students Act will help ensure Alberta's education system remains among the best in the world. It will ensure that our teachers, school boards, and government can focus on realizing the vision set out for us by Albertans in Inspiring Education. I sincerely hope that my colleagues in the Legislature will join me in supporting this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

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

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is a pleasure for me to rise and support Bill 26. I will also say that I have been happy that the Education minister has extended an invitation to work with

members from all caucuses through this process. We were able to meet again last night in his office, which has to be half a dozen times, formal or informal, that we've been able to have those discussions. I'm grateful for that.

A deal with teachers has been, as the minister just communicated, a very long time coming. As the education advocate for the Official Opposition in Alberta, as a parent, and as an Albertan I recognize that labour stability in the classroom for teachers is certainly the best thing for our kids, and I'm grateful for that. Having to legislate the deal is not ideal, and I believe it does require some discussion so that we don't wind up here again.

We are, at least on paper, as the minister just pointed out, I believe, at 96 per cent buy-in or close to that when it comes to the ATA locals, and one board has not signed on. It is a big board, it should be noted. I think they represent 20 per cent or so of the students in the province. We did get to that point – that is all very good – but there has been very strong resistance from more than just a few boards along the way. In fact, some have said that they are only signing on here and supporting it because they're concerned about ramifications if they do not. Some of the discussions that have been had – you know, could boards potentially be amalgamated, or could boards be dissolved? – give you the impression that there are legitimate concerns, and that may have forced some to the table.

Now, initially there was a lot of backlash from boards, and a lot of that had to do with the bargaining process or lack thereof. I think everybody in this Legislature recognizes that there needs to be some improvement on that front. Mr. Speaker, the point that we do need to address also is perhaps: what has caused this to go the last few months to the degree that it has? You see, the government celebrated this deal before it was actually done. The truth is that at the time government really needed a win. We all see the headlines. We all know what's going on, and most Albertans do as well. They pulled out all the bells and whistles in front of the TV cameras to make it known, but they didn't have agreement from a very important organization, and that was the Alberta School Boards Association, the very respected and influential provincial association of locally elected school boards.

The ASBA is, I think, one of if not the leading voice advocating for public education in Alberta. Now, why didn't the government have the ASBA support? Well, it's because they haven't proposed that latest version, that contract, to the boards to review. I know that they did involve the ASBA throughout the two-plus years of negotiating. That was the sticking point from the boards on I believe it was the 15th of March. I would ask the 87 members in here to reach out to your boards when you go home on break. I think you'll find that the messaging you get is different from what we see publicly. I don't blame them for that. It's tough to be critical of the process when you're a school board.

They saw the deal for the first time the morning the government was presenting it to Albertans as a done deal, at least this particular offer. Now, put yourself in the shoes of your locally elected trustee for a moment and consider this. The government, who should be working with you in public education and, I believe, for the most part does a very good job of it – remember that as a trustee in their shoes you are elected – is announcing a deal that you haven't seen or has not been presented officially to you, much less discussed or voted on, to accept. Now, for clarity, the ASBA president had seen the deal a couple of days before but was told that it was embargoed. It was brought to the ASBA board of directors on Thursday. The board saw it Friday morning. Again, that's the day the celebratory announcement was held.

Now, I've heard from more than one trustee on this front, and I completely understand how they would feel. Imagine that your

constituents, that have elected you, in seeing this grandiose press conference, are calling you and asking you questions about it, and you're saying: we haven't had time to review it as a board; I'm not sure we really support it. Up until that point I believe there was great communication. I don't know if somebody just got entirely frustrated with the process and said: look, we've got the ATA onside; we're going to move this along. But bypassing that step was not wise.

The system might be flawed, but what the minister did with this timeline was flawed. If elected officials hadn't seen it until that Friday morning – and that's the day that the press conference was called – I think we can understand why trustees are feeling the way that they are and boards are feeling the way they are. They needed time to see it. They are elected officials. I don't think it's a shocker that the ASBA, to my recollection – I can always be corrected – was not at that press conference on that morning.

All that said, as I said off the top, I am supporting this deal, this legislation today. I've recommended that to my caucus. You know, everybody has a free vote over here, but I'm confident that they will. From a fiscal sense the government did get some things right, a lot right. Teachers are taking a zero per cent increase, as the Minister of Education just said, for three years. Now, if I'm a teacher, I'm probably not doing cartwheels over that, but given the rate of pay and the rate this province is taking on debt, it is the responsible thing to do.

Here again, in my view, the government itself created a problem in negotiating by building up false expectations. You see, before the election – remember the election campaign – there was no talk from the governing party about freezing salaries. They were going to do everything for public education. They were providing predictable, long-term, stable funding for school boards. If it was said once, it was said a hundred times in this Legislature and out on the campaign trail. Predictable, long-term, stable funding for school boards: it was basically a campaign promise.

Now, there was a party that did say: wages would have to be frozen. There was a leader that was honest about that with Albertans and said: because of the fiscal reality, we would have to look at a wage freeze. I proudly sit right behind that leader, who is not here presently.

Mrs. Towle: You can't say that.

Mr. McAllister: I can't say that, and I should not have said that.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I knocked on doors and were honest with those that we talked to, and this was not an easy subject to broach. Generally, it was people at the doors that would broach it, frankly: "Hey, we heard about this wage freeze. What do you think of this? I mean, wait a second. This is my livelihood."

I remember a call I received, in fact, from a teacher who I knew was supporting me, or at least I believed she was because her husband was working on my campaign team, a great friend of mine, a guy I grew up with in Medicine Hat a long time ago. His wife said to me: "Bruce, you know, this was being discussed today in the staff room, and there are a lot of people looking the other direction because of this. This is not something that most people are approving of at this time." Now, granted, things have changed a lot, but this was during the election campaign. You know, I believe I got her vote anyway. But the point I raise is just that it was a difficult conversation to have. I think we looked at the fiscal reality and saw where we were going – I know we did – and were honest about it. When I talked to people at the doors and they asked about it, whether I kept their vote or not, I was honest on

what our leader proposed, and that was what we would have to do with wages.

Now, you wonder why there was more push-back on the teacher deal, and you wonder why it took so long to get here – you can make an argument for times changing; I've heard that so often in here – but effectively you said one thing and did another on this front, and that's frustrating. This same staff room has since had the discussion. Whether they view what I say or what the Minister of Education says as verbatim – well, actually, I don't think they view either as verbatim. What I have heard from that staff room is that they were appreciative that I was honest because that teacher went back to them and told them that, yes, I did support and agree with that discussion raised by my leader to freeze the wages. But you didn't campaign on the wage freezes for teachers, and we did, and I feel it's important to make that note.

5:10

As for the bargaining system itself, well, if we're two and a half years in getting a deal done and all these countless meetings – yeah, I think it is broken. If the shoe fits, as I said earlier today, wear it because it is the government that created this bargaining system and the changes that have been made along the way and the discussions that are held in the backrooms. Everybody in the education circle knows what has happened. I would say to the Education minister and I have said to him to his face several times that I appreciate the work that he has done on this file, but it doesn't absolve him from the fact that his government has created a mess when it comes to these negotiations. The bargaining structure, Mr. Speaker, is what the party made it. Now, the majority of boards might be supporting it. Whether they are holding their noses to a degree is debatable. I believe some of them are.

I've just gone through Bill 26 here and, obviously, was aware of much of the content from others beforehand, and I would just make a note that there are people raising concerns about the exception committees on the autonomy front. I would ask the minister, going forward, to be aware of those if he isn't already. Board members wonder if, depending on how this all plays out, the locally elected boards will wind up with less autonomy. Clearly, they won't be happy with that. The minister has spoken several times about maintaining the autonomy of the locally elected official, so I hope, you know, he honours that, and clearly we'll be watching that going forward.

The capping of hours, I know, is very challenging for several boards also. We don't want to back any schools, particularly smaller schools, into the corner with this agreement.

Now, I don't pretend for one second that negotiating a deal with tens of thousands of teachers or at least their bargaining units and 62 school boards can be easy. I know that it has not been, but I do stand today as the critic/advocate for the Official Opposition in Alberta to say that I am thrilled that we have finally gotten to this point, although it's not ideal, for sure, that we have to legislate.

I, like my colleagues, want what's best in the classroom for our kids, so, you know, I'll be recommending that we support it. I appreciate the time to speak to it today.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act. You know, I must say that I haven't been in this situation before, where a bill has been brought forward like this, obviously in response to ongoing developments in labour negotiations. It's not a back-to-work order because, of course, the people are not on strike, but it

is a legislated agreement for teachers here in the province of Alberta.

I have been reflecting on this considerably for some time, and it's not any great ease or straightforwardness initially that would cause my concern with this. Of course, first and foremost, we want the smooth operation of our public education system and the ongoing, continuous functioning of our education system. You know, I know first-hand, having been a teacher for more than 20 years and having been involved in a labour dispute before, how difficult that is and how contentious and fractious it can be, so really it's the last thing that I would want anywhere any time.

However, I think that on a point of principle and reasoned reflection, I'm finding a great deal of difficulty with this bill and for this body to be legislating the agreement instead of using the procedures of collective bargaining and so forth that we have in place between the school boards and the teachers.

You know, I know that Albertans, Mr. Speaker, are concerned about education and about how things have been going recently in our public education system. This budget is like a slow-moving train wreck, really. I'm getting almost by the hour these new layoffs and program cuts. People are starting to see the actual effects in schools around the budget that is now just being implemented and will continue to be unfolding into the fall.

You know, these are negative effects on the classroom, Mr. Speaker. Some of the effects that we expect to see are that class sizes will increase, right? Teachers are already getting notifications of being laid off. It is often young teachers that are getting these notifications, which I find particularly troublesome because, of course, if we're not renewing our profession, then it makes it difficult to move forward.

I went back to teaching part time, and I was very surprised and gratified to see this new generation of teachers, these young teachers, that are very well trained and very astute and tuned into their profession. You know, the idea of having opportunities for them in the future being compromised with a budget such as we see here today, Mr. Speaker, really, really bothers me a great deal. I just don't believe that that's necessary. We can do something considerably better.

With the budget cuts and with the things that I just mentioned, really, it's not just a bad deal for teachers, but it's a bad deal for students as well because you end up with larger class sizes and special needs and extra attention having to be compromised somehow as well. That is another unfortunate result, Mr. Speaker.

Now, of course, the whole budget and this deal are predicated on the idea that we don't have sufficient money to support our public education system, as we had been doing moving forward, and cannot support the teachers with modest increases to meet the cost of living, increases that we all experience living in the province of Alberta. You know, of course, I think most Albertans find that to be a false premise because as we look all around us in the province, we see our economy growing considerably. We see our population growing. So public services, especially education, have to keep pace with those natural expansions, right? If we don't do so, then you are running the risk of compromising the quality of education that you can deliver to our children from kindergarten to grade 12 but to postsecondary as well. You know, I find that a difficult starting point. It's a starting point where I begin to doubt the necessity for Bill 26.

I guess another issue that I want to bring forward is this idea of negotiating and using a collective bargaining process and then pulling away from that in sort of a very arbitrary manner. Yes, it's true. Almost all school boards did come around to a version of this, as did most of the locals, right? It just tells me that there must be a way by which we could push this through without having to

use the legislation to bring it back. When you do use legislation, it's not just this one thing, this one time, but it's a categorical mechanism to use only, I think, in extreme circumstances.

5:20

The circumstance that we're in here today doesn't seem to warrant that extreme thing, where we are legislating a deal for teachers. You know, imposing a deal on teachers is an affront not just to the teachers but to the basic rights of unionized workers here in Alberta, to collective bargaining. By legislating a deal in this fashion, the government is compromising the collective bargaining process in this province not just for teachers but for all sorts of other workers as well and, I think, probably using this as a tool, quite an aggressive tool, saying: "Oh, well, you know, if you don't take what we are selling, then you can see what happened to the teachers. We will legislate you back. If you don't take a zero, this is the way it works."

It's not just this one circumstance here with the teachers' agreement, but it applies to a whole range of workers that will be going into negotiations over these next two years. You know, we're in negotiations for over two years with this particular deal. By legislating a deal, with all of this work that we did in the past, the right for teachers being struck through collective bargaining has essentially evaporated. It's not something that we take lightly. I know that there's always that tension between the employer and the workers in this regard, and I recognize that that tension is not going away. But you can't expect that if you remove the collective bargaining process and you use legislative actions to secure deals, there will not be a push-back. There will be.

You know, you talk about this idea: "Oh, well, everybody signed up to it. Everybody is good with it." I don't know about that. As I said, I had to reflect on this carefully over time and come to a personal decision that I could live with in regard to this deal. Discussing it with our New Democrat caucus, we came to the same solution. It's not as though we're making a categorical thing here. It's a question of: what's the right thing to do at the right time?

I don't deny that the minister has worked very hard in these last weeks and months. I've watched him, and as the New Democrat critic for Education I've certainly had a good relationship with the minister. I recognize how he and his staff as well have functioned with some earnest faith in trying to come up with something.

What I'm saying is that there are larger issues at question here, that I think can't just be taken aside or compromised for this one particular circumstance and so forth. I hope that people do recognize that and recognize the value and the role of constructive criticism from other viewpoints that can hopefully give us guideposts for the future because we're not just doing this for now. Whenever we do something in this Legislature, we set a precedent for how the future will unfold. I just want to, you know, let it be known that legislating and dissolving collective agreement processes is not necessarily something that we would accept now or in the future.

I guess a measure of the tepid response to the way everything has gone down is that the Alberta Teachers Association was looking for a deal, but the president said that he, referring to the Minister of Education here today, had to do this in order to keep the deal alive. "We will accept it, but it's not our preferred solution." It's not exactly a wildly enthusiastic response. I think that the ATA is trying to predicate their position with the fact that they are very concerned about how budget cuts are affecting the quality of education here in the province.

We look at, for example, this idea of trying to negotiate better working conditions for teachers. Well, as I said in my questions

earlier this afternoon, if we have these other cuts rolling through, then even the best of intentions in trying to improve working conditions are undermined by the larger class sizes and so forth that we'll see in these coming weeks and months as this budget unfolds.

You know, as I say, perhaps more emphatically when we're in question period but still the same here today, if we can restore the funding to the levels that we had even last year, look for an investment in wages that meets the cost of living for teachers here and other education workers in the province, and make an investment that's commensurate with the increase in our economy and in our population, then we will do well. We have a very, very good education system here in this province that is internationally recognized. It is producing high-quality students and a high degree of professionalism from the classroom right through to the school boards and, I believe, to the ministry as well. I just refuse to stand by and sort of say, when anything compromises that, that I will not speak and push back or provide some constructive criticism.

Mr. Speaker, I do have a motion that I would like to bring forward here now. It's a notice that the motion for second reading of Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act, be now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I have the appropriate copies here, including the original.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you'll just circulate those to the page and if the page would bring us a copy up here, please. Thank you.

Hon. members, while the pages distribute the bill – please carry on distributing, pages – I will just note for the record here that this is a notice of amendment on Bill 26, Assurance for Students Act, and it has been read into the record. Essentially, it's a referral amendment.

If there are any speakers to this, I would entertain them now. The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Sure. Thank you. This referral, of course, is looking to put the bill to the committee. You know, I just think it's an overall demonstration. Again, we're seeing time limits effectively put onto Bill 26. We've had another procedural thing, where we're allowed to have more than one reading of a bill in a day with Bill 26. I just put this referral as a way for us to just pause and remind ourselves that we're not in such a big rush here, right? It's not as though there's a strike on or whatever. It's a normal procedure.

It's been a long time coming, but as we move through trying to create something that people can live with and find resolution with for teachers and school boards and the government and the people of Alberta all together, collectively, I don't think that rushing it is necessarily part of that whole equation, right? Haste makes waste and all that. Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to be the voice of some caution here so that we can maybe take a breath or two and think about what exactly is best for education here in the province.

You know, I know that there are a lot of different opinions out there, and I know that the opinion is evolving on this bill and on exactly where we're going with it, so I just want to make sure that the people of Alberta know, too, that we're not jamming something through here that was not in the best interests of our students and of Alberta education in general. If people can read this over carefully and think about it and perhaps think about accepting it, I would be very grateful.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-McCall under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Kang: My question is to the member. How is it going to help the students if we refer it to the committee? How is referring this to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities going to be helpful to the teachers or to the boards or to the students?

5:30

Mr. Eggen: Well, sure. That's great. I think part of what we've seen in the last few days and weeks – you know, I've thought about this carefully, right? It is not as though the schools are not functioning now. They are, right? The schools are functioning, and teachers are teaching, and the schools are moving ahead. If we take a bit more time to try to work something out here and perhaps put the money in that's necessary to in fact meet the limits of school class sizes and so forth and have a sober second look at the budget cuts that have taken place in the last few weeks, that are slowly unfolding, then, in fact, we might just find a way by which we can improve the situation that we are in now.

You know, sometimes we all rush around with this idea that, well, kids come first, and this is all in the best interests of the students and all that. Okay. Well, yeah. Absolutely. That's why I'm putting this forward here today, right? If something doesn't happen in the next 48 hours in regard to Bill 26, the sky will not fall – right? – the schools will carry on teaching, and, in fact, maybe people can take a little breath of fresh air and not think that they're being steamrolled down the highway here with something that's not in the best interests of students.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Question has been called.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 26 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the bill. Are there any other speakers to the bill? Calgary-McCall, did you wish to speak to the bill?

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All right. Proceed.

Mr. Kang: I'm also glad to speak on Bill 26, the Assurance for Students Act, Mr. Speaker, although we were hopeful that the teachers' deal would be signed and, you know, we would move on, and life will be smooth after that. Sixty-one of the 62 school boards signed on, but one didn't, and two of the teachers' unions also didn't sign the deal. At stake is long-time peace in the classroom. The budget cuts surely would affect maybe the whole process, and school class sizes are going to be large. Because the population is growing, that's going to strain the resources of the school boards.

The school boards were concerned about the hidden costs that may come up. Two of the unions were also a little reluctant to sign on, and the school boards were a little reluctant, but they signed the deal. Six hundred thousand students right across the province will be affected if the deal is not signed.

Majority rules, and the majority of the boards have signed onto the deal and the majority of the unions have signed on. Although nobody likes a legislated settlement, I'm worried about what kind of precedent this bill is going to set for future negotiations, you

know, if they fall apart. I think we should have a little more time to discuss this bill. I think we're just rushing through it. You know, the sky will not fall if the deal is not signed today.

We will be supporting this bill, but there should be more scrutiny and discussion on the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to Bill 26?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: There are no other speakers, and question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 25 Children First Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise to move third reading of the Children First Act. I believe this to be a very important piece of legislation for this House in this spring session, carrying out some of the promises made by our Premier and our government with respect to putting a focus on early childhood development, putting a focus on children in poverty, putting a focus on ensuring that children get a good start. This bill is, of course, not the be-all and the end-all on that. It's just a good start or a good continuation, I guess, of the progress that's been made.

Through the results-based budgeting process we are examining everything that we're doing to determine that we're getting the most effective result and that we're achieving outcomes. That's an important process. But, Mr. Speaker, I think it's also very important to make sure that we take steps that people out there in the community have been telling us are necessary steps, and one of those is fundamental in this bill. We spent a lot of time talking about it last night, but it is absolutely fundamental, and that is the provision which makes it clear that professionals who are working together in the best interests of children to help children overcome barriers to success, to protect children at risk, to protect children in harm's way, to assist with the safety, education, and health of a child, can actually get together at the same table and share their information in the best interests of that child.

I think it's very clear that that's not licence to put the information out on the street or to the public, that privacy is important, but so is the appropriate sharing of information. We have very strong privacy legislation in this province, and as a result, we've developed a culture which defaults to no. That's not right for our children. That's not right for the kids of Alberta. This act goes a long way to set the proper stage for the collaboration of agencies.

There's no better example of that, Mr. Speaker, than the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in Calgary, where the community came together and worked with government agencies. So we have the co-location of the Calgary city police, Human Services, and a number of agencies. They're located on the same floor of the building. There's a place there where children can be brought in. There's a play area for them. They can be comfortable. There are interview rooms so that they can be interviewed in the case of children who have been the subject of sexual assault or

other physical harm. They can be interviewed once. They don't have to tell their story over and over again. They don't have to be revictimized. The counsellors are co-located. The information is there.

They can only do their work appropriately if they are allowed to share information, so they have been strong advocates. The Calgary chief of police was here when the bill was introduced, and his response I think said it all. He said: thank you for listening to us and for responding to what we've been asking for. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated that when she was Solicitor General and I was Minister of Justice, we heard over and over again people saying: we need to be able to collaborate for the kids' sake; we need to be able to come together and share the information appropriately. That's what's happening.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my wife has been an educator for 35 years. She's been the principal of a high school in Edmonton for the last four years and previous to that principal of a junior high in Edmonton for seven years and previous to that occupied a number of other leadership and teaching positions with the Edmonton public school board. I can tell you that every single year she has come home throughout the year with issues with respect to children: children who are at risk for suicide; children who have attempted suicide; children who have been abused in some way; children who have challenges and barriers to success; alcohol and drug addictions, either themselves or their families; issues with respect to mental health relative to coming out of depression as the result of a loss of a loved one or a family breakdown or some other situation. There are challenges out there for our children, and there are challenges for the people who want to serve our children.

Our educators are at the forefront of that. They're in the position where they get to see it on a day-to-day basis and have a relationship with children and understand when there's a change in a child's life. They can identify that change, and they can understand that the child needs some assistance.

5:40

What they don't have are the resources to be able to actually provide that assistance on an ongoing basis. They need to reach out to a child care worker or to someone in the health system or sometimes even someone in the police system, and they need to be able to communicate what's happening and communicate with those other people in our community who are working with them to be there for the children.

This act is a great leap forward, in my view, in that particular area, but it does more. It provides for the development of a children's charter so that we can actually be focused on the things that we need to do when we're developing policy to understand what's in the best interests of children and how we can make children's lives better so that they can grow up to be successful citizens and contribute back to the community like members here. The review provision suggests that we should look at all of our legislation and policies so that we put that focus on it to say: what do we need to do to remove barriers to success, and what can we add to help achieve success?

Particularly, the information-sharing piece with respect to the research side, information sharing for research purposes. A number of years ago Iris Evans, the minister at the time with children's services, was instrumental in setting up the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research for the purposes of facilitating research with respect to children and setting up a child and youth data lab so that we could take the information that we have, anonymized data that we have, and use it for research purposes to help us drive understanding, drive

longitudinal analyses of the effectiveness of programs and those sorts of things. Then, through our privacy legislation, we essentially shut them out of the very data that they needed to be able to do that research. This act will open that door and make it much easier to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in my experience we've had very good and desirable goals, but as a result of those goals, we've developed a protocol-writing business in this province, where if you wanted to share information with a data lab, you had to have the lawyers working. There's nothing wrong with lawyers; lawyers do a great job. But I don't think we need a protocol-writing industry to write protocols on how we should share information between government departments and between departments and agencies in appropriate circumstances.

When I was in Education, we celebrated the fact that we finally developed a protocol agreement for information sharing with respect to children in care between children's services and Education. When a child was apprehended and was in the custody of the Crown, we needed to be able to talk with Education, the department, and the school boards where that child was and share information about the child. It took us three years to develop a protocol agreement to do that. People who were doing that were doing their work. They were doing their job. They were operating within the parameters that we gave them, and it took them three years to do that.

This act will change that. This act will make it possible for those things to happen on a timely basis, for people to understand that they can work together to share the information, that we can share the information appropriately with the child and youth data lab and the research centre, and that we can learn from our information and help drive better decision-making.

There are many other aspects in this act, Mr. Speaker. I won't go through them all because we have discussed them. Setting up the family violence death review committee, a very important step so that we can learn from the tragedy. The only greater tragedy than death from family violence and intimate partner violence is if we don't learn from that to see if we can do a better job.

Why does that belong in the Children First Act? Well, we know that family violence is cyclical, that often people who are perpetrators of family violence were victims of family violence in their own lives. We know that children in poverty often live in families where there is family violence. All of these social issues are connected, and if we deal with these social issues, we can deal with the issues of child poverty, we can get children into school and properly educated so that they, too, can become successful citizens, whatever success might mean to them because every child has different gifts. That's the key. It's to have every child be able to maximize their personal potential, maximize their gifts.

There are other parts of this act that are key to protecting children. Just lowering the bar a little bit so that instead of there having to be an imminent danger to the health or safety of a person before you can disclose information, a risk of harm for that child would be the bar. Why should we wait until a child is teetering on the edge of a cliff before we reach out to save them? Why should it have to be that imminent harm? Well, this act changes that, Mr. Speaker.

There are many other aspects that I could go into here, but I think it's been good work. I know there have been suggestions that we needed more time and more thoughtful analysis and all that. Mr. Speaker, we could always take more time, and we will have more time.

We will have time over the next six months and perhaps even longer to work together to collaboratively develop the children's charter. We will have time over the next six months to a year to

collaboratively work together to review programs, policies, and legislation relative to children and come back and visit that. We will have time over the next little while to work on a poverty reduction strategy with respect to children and families. We will have time over the next six months to talk about family violence and renewal of the family violence strategy. We will have time over the next six months to a year to work on the early childhood development initiative, which we're pleased to lead with Health and with Education in this government. There are lots of things on our table. We do not need to take more time for stuff that we can do now.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that we pass this bill in third reading and get on with the job.

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this in third reading. I will be brief. I do believe that this bill, inasmuch as it is quite large, is going to be a lot of positive steps forward for the children of this province. I'd like to thank and congratulate the minister for bringing this forward and, you know, finding ourselves where we are with it today.

I think it is rather aptly named as well, Children First Act. I know the minister likes to point out and remind us why he wears the pin on his lapel, and I think that it's quite nice that this bill does actually put children first in the sense that there was a time prior to this bill being passed – it obviously hasn't yet but will be probably shortly – where protection of information sometimes came first, before the protection or the safety of a child. I think that this recognizes that that is not necessarily the way it should be, that we as a society should be doing absolutely everything that we can to protect our children at any given time, and there are a number of areas where that happens in this bill.

I would also like to thank the minister, Mr. Speaker, for the way in which he conducted his ministry's business around presenting this bill. We as opposition parties were invited to sit down with him and go through a briefing. It is obviously a fairly thick piece of legislation. He was open to questions; he was open to answering our questions. To be quite frank, if I may, throughout the process of dealing with amendments and potential amendments, I think we saw two amendments pass from two different opposition parties, and that's the first bill that we can say that we've had that happen in the 28th Legislature.

I think that perhaps some of the other ministers across the way might like to look to the Minister of Human Services as a bit of an example as to how to pass legislation and how to do it in a way that makes opposition feel as though they're valued in the process as opposed to stonewalled. I truly do feel . . .

An Hon. Member: Valued?

Mr. Wilson: Perhaps. There are others noticing that as well.

That being said, I think that it allowed us to truly strengthen the bill in a couple of ways and to collaborate with the government, and I think that we'll walk out of here thinking that it's a bit of a win-win on passing this bill through third reading.

I look forward to the consultations around the children's charter – I know that the minister has also suggested that opposition will be invited to the table during that process – and bringing it back to the House as a separate piece or a separate motion and debating it as a group again, as it should be done, in the fall or whenever the minister is ready for that.

That being said, I'm proud to have played a role in this, a small role, as it were, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McAllister: A bit part.

Mr. Wilson: Yes, a bit part.

I'm very happy to see this pass. As a father, as a legislator, as a public servant I do believe that the province is better with this legislation than it would have been without it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to speak on Bill 25, the Children First Act. I have seen the minister wearing the pin I think as far back as I can remember. We all agree that he's got the best interests of kids at heart. It would be great if there were some poverty reduction programs in place so that the kids that go to school don't go to school hungry.

5:50

Sure, there has been much debate on the bill, and the minister is promising a lot more for the children's charter. You know, in the next six months he will be doing a whole lot to maybe improve on this bill. But this bill is a first step in the right direction, and I hope we can work together to strengthen this bill further.

There were some privacy concerns raised by the Privacy Commissioner. I hope those concerns will be addressed in the near future. Somehow they have to be addressed to make it a perfect bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there any other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has now been called.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 25 read a third time]

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act

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

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise and move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act.

This bill is administrative in nature, and my comments for the most part will reflect that. However, a bit of historical context will allow the Assembly to better understand the need for the bill. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, colloquially referred to as the Mormon or LDS church, is a global hierarchical Christian denomination with nearly 15 million members world-wide. There's no paid clergy. All those that serve in the church serve as volunteers and have regular jobs and responsibilities in communities and families and homes.

Mr. Speaker, church members first settled in southern Alberta in 1887. They brought with them an understanding of farming in dry climate and how to use irrigation properly. They built strong communities, taught the love of family. Today the church has over 182,000 members in Canada, including approximately 77,000 in Alberta. The church currently has 208 congregations in Alberta.

In 1897 church members successfully petitioned the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories for an ordinance incorporating the church's Cardston Stake under the name the President and High Council of the Alberta Stake of Zion. This ordinance was among the earliest charters granted a church in the Northwest Territories.

In 1927 church members successfully petitioned the Parliament in Ottawa for a private act incorporating the church's Lethbridge Stake under the name the President of the Lethbridge Stake. This private act was replaced by a further private act of Parliament in 1981.

In 1951 church members successfully petitioned the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for a private act incorporating the church's Taylor Stake, now the Raymond Stake, under the name the President and High Council of the Taylor Stake of Zion.

The church presently operates in Canada through a trust formed in 1968. The executive trustees of this trust are the presidents of the church's six stakes in Calgary. A stake, by the way, Mr. Speaker, is a collection of seven to 10 congregations. The trust is a registered charity with the Canada Revenue Agency. The church, as I said, does not have a paid clergy at the congregational or stake level. Rather, such clergy or volunteers have careers in various fields. The senior stake president of the six Calgary stakes, the petitioner who has brought forward this bill, is Dr. Stephen Miller, an orthopaedic surgeon.

The church also has a social service agency, LDS Family Services of Canada, and a for-profit ranching company called Deseret Ranches of Alberta. The current structure as described is unwieldy and cumbersome. It causes a great undue burden to volunteers to do all of the administrative work. The best way to simplify the church's Canadian legal structure and the purpose of this bill is to incorporate the trust in Alberta and amalgamate into

that the corporation of the three existing incorporated stakes, as mentioned.

This simplification, which is made possible in the case of the President of the Lethbridge Stake by the recent Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, requires that a private bill be enacted by the Legislative Assembly. The private bill includes provisions suggested by Legislative Counsel to address registration and financial transparency issues and by Service Alberta's registry branch, who have met with the Private Bills Committee of the Assembly. At this time I'd like to thank both Legislative Counsel and Service Alberta for their assistance, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'd call the question on second reading of Bill Pr. 1, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada Act.

The Speaker: Are there other speakers?

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Merely a formality, Mr. Speaker. What he said I support. And I'll sit down.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Seeing none, the question has been called.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in light of the hour I'd move that we adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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Other inquiries:

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