



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, October 29, 2013

Issue 62e

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27

Flood Recovery and Reconstruction Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to move second reading of Bill 27, the Flood Recovery and Reconstruction Act.

This act includes four amendments to the Municipal Government Act as well as three amendments to the Emergency Management Act. These amendments will help us build a safer Alberta by enshrining policy decisions made during the government's response to the 2013 floods. They're practical, forward-looking measures that will support the largest recovery effort in Alberta's history, and they will help Alberta better respond to emergencies in the future.

The amendments to the MGA will help improve public safety in a number of ways. The first will permanently enact a provision created under the regulation earlier this year to temporarily exempt municipalities from the requirements of the MGA when they are facing an emergency. We used this tool, Mr. Speaker, during the June floods so community leaders could focus on public safety instead of administrative encumbrances. It was an effective and practical way to support our partners.

The other three amendments to the MGA focus on floodway development in particular. Allowing development of floodways, areas where flooding has deeper, faster, and more destructive water flows, cannot be permitted anymore, Mr. Speaker. Floodway development is a threat to the public, to property, and at the same time is an unacceptable liability for taxpayers. This is why the government is proposing to restrict new development in floodways to limit damage and risks to public safety posed by future floods.

While it is imperative that we restrict new development on floodways, we must also ensure this policy is fair and reasonable. To this end, we are proposing an amendment that will honour the investment and choices made by current owners of floodway properties. This amendment will permit owners of existing floodway properties to replace existing buildings with new buildings intended for the same use.

Finally, we need to account for the special circumstances of those municipalities with significant development already in a floodway such as Fort McMurray or Drumheller. For these municipalities it would be impractical – frankly, impossible – and unnecessary to restrict floodway development. This proposed amendment gives this legislation a reasonable amount of flexibility for municipalities in these unique and particular situations.

This brings me now to the three amendments to the Emergency Management Act. The Emergency Management Act is the blueprint which guided the municipal and provincial emergency response to the flood. It is the document which gave this government the authority to provide financial assistance to thousands of Albertans devastated by this disaster this summer. It

is the law by which emergency officials in communities across southern Alberta were able to make life-and-limb decisions with confidence to protect life, property, and environment as floodwaters rose.

The value of the Emergency Management Act cannot be overstated, and today we have three amendments that will make it even more effective. The first proposed amendment will give the government the authority to provide flood mitigation funding. As we undertake the largest recovery effort this country has ever seen, Mr. Speaker, finding innovative and cost-effective ways to mitigate flood damage is more important than ever before. This amendment will help us do just that. It will allow the government to fully implement the province's policy to provide communities and individuals with mitigation funding today and tomorrow. Albertans will be able to rest assured that this valuable source of assistance to families and communities with flood damage will be available for future disaster recovery programs related to floods. This amendment also reflects our responsibility to taxpayers and will help the government leverage federal cost-sharing opportunities.

Just over four months ago we saw the dangers of living in flood hazard areas and the devastation left by the flood. This second amendment to the Emergency Management Act will help all Albertans understand the risks of living in flood hazard areas. It will protect potential buyers of properties in flood hazard areas by giving the government the authority to place caveats on land titles that indicate whether the property is eligible for disaster assistance in the event of another flood. These caveats will give potential buyers of a home in a flood fringe or floodway the information they need before purchasing a flood-affected home as well as current owners so they can best decide how to rebuild after the floods. Only properties in a floodway or flood fringe that are rebuilt or repaired using disaster recovery program assistance will have a caveat put on their land titles.

I've already spoken about flood mitigation and how this government is helping individuals and communities build smarter with an eye to reducing damage from future floods. We are giving owners of flood fringe properties the ability to have their caveat removed by putting the minimum flood mitigation measures in place. This means that any current or future owner of a flood fringe property that has been mitigated can rest assured that they will be eligible for future disaster recovery program assistance in the future. The caveats placed on floodway properties, however, are permanent, but the province has given owners of these properties the option to relocate out of the floodway, Mr. Speaker.

The third and final amendment to the Emergency Management Act will extend the duration of a provincial state of emergency from 14 days up to 28 days, when it will expire or, if necessary, be renewed. Currently a provincial state of emergency can only be renewed by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly. This is neither practical nor sensible to do when a disaster is in progress, and government leaders from both levels of government are engaged in supporting the emergency response. Extending the duration of a provincial state of emergency will allow the government to focus on public safety during those rare, rare circumstances when the province uses this tool or when a disaster occurs when the Legislature is not sitting. This amendment does not, however, change the fact that a resolution of the Legislative Assembly will be required to renew a provincial state of emergency beyond the 28 days.

This change gives our province stronger protection against future floods and future disasters and will help ensure our families and communities are well protected. We can't stop a future flood, Mr. Speaker, no matter what some people say, but we can make

sure we're as prepared as possible because there is no such thing as flood-proofing, but there is being prepared for the next flood. It's all part of our government's efforts to build Alberta to ensure a strong quality of life for us all. I look forward to further debate of this important legislation that will enhance and ensure the safety and security of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I move to adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28 Modernizing Regional Governance Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and particularly pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 28, the Modernizing Regional Governance Act, which amends the Municipal Government Act. The act provides the framework for the local governments in Alberta to operate.

Now let me outline, please, briefly the proposed amendments. First, the Capital Region Board was established in 2008 by a regulation under the Municipal Government Act. This legislation would elevate the creation of growth management plans such as the Capital Region Board into the act. It would also confirm the purpose, structure, and membership of the Capital Region Board and validate all actions and decisions made by the Capital Region Board.

As well, Bill 28 would validate 15 other regulations made under the section 603 regulation provision within the MGA. These amendments to the MGA follow through on our commitments to regional collaboration and strong regional governance, and their time has come, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

7:40 Bill 29 Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Horne]

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour here tonight to rise on Bill 29, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013. This appears to be more of an administrative bill that's necessary to comply with changes to the Food and Drugs Act in Ottawa. As Ottawa regulates prescription drugs, changes to this law necessitate a corresponding change to Alberta's Pharmacy and Drug Act.

But I think we need to step back a little bit and review the devastation that was inflicted upon Albertans by the Minister of Health's what we called Fred-icare plan. What we saw was a big revolt by pharmacists across Alberta, particularly in rural Alberta, where individuals in the pharmacy industry were very concerned with the drastic changes that were made. They signed a petition. Thousands of Albertans signed those petitions complaining about the unilateral decision made by the Health minister to inflict damage upon our pharmacy industry.

One of the main aspects of their concerns was the lack of consultation. I'm hoping that with Bill 29 the Minister of Health has in fact learned some lessons from his time dealing with the changes that he made to the pharmacy industry. Some of the

biggest issues that were pertinent as a result of his changes were, of course, higher prices to those individuals that required prescription drugs. A lot of those individuals, of course, were seniors who are on fixed incomes and were devastated by a lot of the changes that were made.

The second big change was a shortage or a lack of drugs available due to the changes that were made. Again and again here in question period we'd ask questions to the Minister of Health about why these drugs were triple or quadruple the price prior to the changes he implemented. We asked why some drugs that were previously available were no longer available, and he still did not have any answers.

The other aspect that was an issue at least in my area was the fact that due to the changes made by the Minister of Health, a lot of the rural pharmacists in my area didn't know whether or not they could provide services to my constituents. Obviously, pharmacists are an integral component of our health care system, and the fact that they expressed concern – who would have thought pharmacists would be marching on the Legislature? Only this government could rile up those types of individuals.

We've seen subsequent to these changes not only the potential for rural pharmacists to close down their shops, but also just at a minimum we've seen reductions in services. So, of course, previously where the pharmacists would provide specific services to seniors in my constituency, now, due to these changes implemented by the Minister of Health, in many cases they no longer have the capacity to provide those services to our seniors. That was a very, very important issue in my area. It was detrimental to the health care that was provided to Albertans.

Of course, going back to Bill 29, there were changes that were made federally as part of the Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act, 2012, which was Bill C-38, which received royal assent on June 29, 2012. The government had amended the Food and Drugs Act to give the Minister of Health certain powers, which included the power to establish a list that set out prescription drugs. In summary, I believe that this bill is intended to comply with the changes that were made federally and get in line with the federal legislation. In short, Ottawa changed its laws, so now, as a result of those changes, we have to, too.

So we believe that, you know, it's possible for the Health minister to modify the approved drug list without a specific legislative amendment. Oftentimes ministers give themselves extraordinary powers in a regulation-making capacity, but in this case the minister apparently felt that it was necessary to modify this approved drug list with a legislative amendment.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, we very much oppose the backhanded, lack-of-consultation approach that the Minister of Health took with respect to the overall impact on pharmacy and prescription drugs here in Alberta. This act itself is primarily an administrative bill. It deals with the changes that were made in Ottawa and ensures that our legislation adequately corresponds to the changes that the federal Minister of Health put forward in the Jobs, Growth and Long-term Prosperity Act, which is Bill C-38, which received royal assent mid-last year. You know, it was very, very frustrating to deal with the Minister of Health about his changes to the prescription drugs. In this case it seems like the intent of this bill is just to correspond with the Ottawa legislation. That seems to be an overall good intent, and we look forward to the Committee of the Whole to potentially put forward subsequent amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 29, Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013. You know, when I saw this on the Order Paper and heard about the intention of this government to have pharmacy and drug on the table, I initially was getting quite excited and feeling optimistic. There are so many problems with the pharmacy situation here in the province of Alberta right now in regard to seniors' pharmacy, in regard to affordability of drugs and the dispensation of drugs. As the Health critic for the Alberta New Democrats I have dealt quite a lot with the unstable landscape that pharmacy exists under here in Alberta at this time.

I thought cautiously optimistically that the Health minister was bringing in something to resolve some of these issues, but in fact the scope of this bill is quite narrow. It's certainly necessary. It helps to harmonize the provincial statutes with a new change in regard to the drug regulations federally here in Canada. I guess that's pretty much all it does. Certainly, I see no reason to stand in the way of it, but also I just do want to remind all of us here in the Legislature of the responsibility that we have to continue to reform our overall pharmacy position here in the province of Alberta.

We have a public health system here in the province, but we don't have a harmonized public pharmacy system in place. You can see it's almost a textbook case, Mr. Speaker, where we can learn about the inefficiencies and problems associated with mixing private and public delivery and dispensation of health care in the way that we see our pharmacy system here in the province right now. We can certainly not only improve health outcomes through better coverage and more affordable coverage and fewer incidences of people not taking the drugs that they require as prescribed by their doctors, but we could save considerable money if we did have an integrated pharmacare plan for all residents of Alberta.

7:50

I would venture to say as well that the third part of any comprehensive public health initiative is that it provides that much more safety and security for the residents of Alberta by knowing that they can have access to top-quality pharmaceutical prescription medicine that their doctors prescribe when they need it for themselves and for their family.

So I challenge, certainly, the Health minister to especially start in the place where the most uncertainty and anxiety does exist here, Mr. Speaker, in regard to pharmacy, and that's in regard to seniors' pharmacy. I know that there have been at least two attempts to have more of a user-pay private-style pharmacy system for seniors here in this province, and both times the government has backed down on that.

I just learned, actually, today, because I was away in southern Alberta, that again the seniors' pharmaceutical strategy has been postponed here in the province of Alberta, hopefully indefinitely. While we have to fight and defend what public pharmacy system we do have for seniors in this province, I think our energies could be better served by actually strengthening the public dispensation of prescription drugs to seniors and ensuring that it always stays universal and affordable and employing best practices through bulk purchasing and so forth.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, in regard to specifically Bill 29, we know that this update is sort of harmonizing with the federal government's listing of prescription drugs, and this act will now refer to a prescription drug list rather than the old schedule F that was used previously. This bill brings the Alberta Pharmacy and Drug Act into compliance with federal changes, which is good. The federal changes mean that a list of prescription drugs may

now be changed by the federal Minister of Health rather than requiring a full regulatory procedure.

I would venture to say as well, Mr. Speaker, that this is a signal that we're seeing federally that the other jurisdictions, provinces and territories as well as the federal government across Canada, are interested in a more comprehensive pharmacare plan for this country. I think it's well advised for us to put in place more features such as this and be braver about the features we put in place to ensure that we can take full advantage of a comprehensive publicly delivered pharmacare plan here in this province as well. Of course, a national pharmacare plan would be ideal because you are employing the benefits of bulk purchasing and so forth, which can really save a lot of money.

I think that as we move forward – I don't see the minister, the sponsor, here today, but I would like to ask him some questions, so I will leave it at that for now. I'm happy to see that at least the word "pharmacy" is appearing on our Order Paper and that we carry on with the good work to ensure that we have a public pharmacare program in place here in the province of Alberta in short order.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, just a reminder that we don't refer to the presence or absence of any member. I'm sure that was an oversight.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just rereading *Hansard* to grab the comments that were made by the Minister of Health when he introduced this bill. It appears to be clear from his four sentences of introduction to the bill – I guess we should congratulate him on his brevity, but it didn't give a lot of additional information – that this is just lining up the provincial legislation with the federal legislation and that there is no policy change to Alberta's scheduling of drugs and no cost to the government. Fair enough. You know, there are always pluses and minuses with this. My understanding of this – sorry; I don't have a medical background, so I hope I'm not misunderstanding this. Let me back up a bit.

The Canada Health Act sets out what is covered for public health care in Canada, and the delivery of that health care is done by the provinces. When that original Tommy Douglas act was brought to fruition, there were a couple of things that didn't make it into the bill. The Canada Health Act is several evolutions later. Nonetheless, a couple of things didn't make it into the bill. The big ones were pharmaceuticals, drug coverage, dentistry, and there's one other. It might be new technology, which is why we always kind of struggle with those MRIs, and there's now one that starts with a C, and all the new technology that we get. Of course, those are also the fastest rising cost points in the health care system – what a surprise – I think largely because they aren't being delivered through the public system with as tight control as when we're having to pay for it through insurance.

Pharmaceuticals are outside of the Canada Health Act, and as a result each province can decide how they're going to handle that, which drugs they're going to pay for. So we can end up with this, to outsiders, very convoluted process, where the feds will okay a drug, but really what they're doing is saying: we believe it passes the scrutiny of the food and drug administration act, so we'll put it on our list saying that it's gone through X number of tests and supposedly won't harm anyone. I put "supposedly" in there just

as, you know, a cautionary tale. Then each province can decide whether they're going to cover the cost of that drug or not.

Now, I know that when the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was Health minister and I was his critic, he had explained that the government's policy on this was that they would cover new drugs that were transformative. That may still be the policy. I'm not sure. It was under him.

We often receive letters from constituents saying: "Please, my friend or my spouse or my child will get better with this drug or will have their life prolonged or it will lead them to a recovery. Why is the province not covering the cost of the drug?" The answer is: because it's either not gone through that blue-ribbon expert panel to say, "Yes, this provincial government will cover the cost of it under the pharmaceutical scheme that they have here in Alberta," or it's possible that it's gone through that committee, and the committee said, "No, we're not going to cover it." That's hard for people to understand from the outside, the process. It is an expert committee, and I think they did that so that politicians couldn't get in there and push it around so that, you know, I could get the drug that I wanted for my constituent and be a hero to all, or perhaps someone else could stop my people from getting drugs. I don't know.

Then we have the whole situation about how we have people in Alberta pay for drugs. A lot of this comes to the feet of this government. When I look at the legislation and the brief comments that were made, it appears that the federal government is giving us a plus and a minus. This government's fondness for putting in what was having to pass through the House of Commons and in this case the Legislative Assembly can now be done not even through regulations but through the ministerial yes or no, which makes me very uncomfortable.

We've got the federal government saying that, well, the minister can now put a drug list online and may change it whenever he wants. Well, okay. That should give some of us hope that the minister could add drugs that we would like to see added or maybe faster. But it also means that they could take drugs off as they choose. The provincial government has now lined itself up with and recognized that online list of drugs, so we're now paddling in the same direction. We're recognizing that that list is the list that has the drugs that are allowed for sale in Canada.

8:00

As you can tell, I'm very cautious about having a minister being able to add or take away from a list by not using a regulation, which, although it doesn't have scrutiny, at least is running through some kind of a process, one would hope. We are now going to follow that and accept whatever turns up or doesn't turn up on that list. I think there's cause for caution there. I understand, you know, the brotherly relationship, sisterly relationship, sibling relationship – let me try that – between this government and the federal government, coming from the same family, if I may say, and reacting to things often in the same manner. It is giving me some caution.

However, like many of the bills that we are dealing with in this session, this is a very brief bill. It's actually two pages long, and that's stretching it because they put the clauses on different pages just to spread it out, I guess.

My concern around anything to do with drugs on and off lists and the scope of what the pharmacies are doing for us in distributing those drugs is the sale of health practices or the encouragement of the purchasing of health commingled with a genuine wellness function.

We have done some very good things with pharmacies, I believe, in that we allowed them to refill prescriptions without

necessarily having the doctor's renewal permission – and this is given a close working relationship between a pharmacy and somebody coming in – and it's expected that the pharmacy then relates back to the doctor in fairly good time. We also have allowed them to give injections, for example, which, given some of the massive health disasters, if we could call it that, like SARS, seems like a pretty good idea. All of a sudden you don't just have doctors and nurses that can give injections for vaccinations, for example; you've got every pharmacist in Alberta. Those are very good access points. I think that was a good idea.

Where I have a bit of problem is where those wellness initiatives commingle with sales. It just gets a little too close for me. For example, pharmacists have lists of people they could directly mail if they wanted to and say: we notice – what's your constituency?

Mr. Donovan: Little Bow.

Ms Blakeman: Little Bow. If the Member for Little Bow got a note from his pharmacist saying, "You know, we noticed that you've been taking some blood pressure medication" – by the way, I've no idea if the Member for Little Bow is taking any kind of medication at all. I'm just picking on him. But they say: you know, we noticed that you're taking blood pressure medication, so why don't you come on in, and we'll give you a free blood pressure test, and we'll give you advice. Of course, the advice is, "Well, you should maybe consider buying a home blood pressure kit," which of course isn't covered under health care. It'd be out of pocket. But he's a little nervous. He's serving his constituents of Little Bow. He doesn't want to end up in the hospital or something, so: well, yeah; okay. He doesn't really want to spend the money, but he talks himself into it, that he should buy this extra thing, this extra blood pressure monitor. Good.

See, there's a commingling of a good wellness practice – taking your blood pressure, checking it – and the sale of something. With the pharmacy's ability to know who needs what health benefit or who needs what sort of wellness advice, this is where we don't cover anything. This kind of practice can easily take place and can certainly influence people, who all want to be healthy and certainly want to feel good. Thank you very much, Member for Little Bow, for using you as an example. If we needed to do something about pharmacies and drug prescriptions, there's a place we could do something about it.

The second place we could do something positive about drug purchase and distribution and what's on what list the Member for Edmonton-Calder has already talked about. That is a federal or interprovincial or national – honestly, I really don't care what you call it – pharmacare program, where we would be able to participate in larger bulk buying, where we could have agreements, a seamless system, for approving the drugs for safety and approving the drugs for payment in that federal-provincial exchange.

I think there's much that we could do there, and I don't know what the holdup is here. I don't know why we can't get this. It sure makes sense to a lot of Albertans. Sometimes I think it's just the health ministers that get in a little twist there and just don't want to co-operate – I don't know – or they're all trying to pick on the federal government and get more. I don't know and – you know what? – I don't care. I just really want them to work on this. So there's another thing the government could do around pharmaceuticals if they really wanted to do something.

The last thing is the seniors' drug insurance plan, that has now come up once two Health ministers ago, which was, if I may say, a flaming disaster. I took that plan, that seniors would have to buy into an insurance plan that was income tested on a monthly

premium basis to be able to have a prescription drug plan, and I talked to a lot of seniors over the summer of whatever that was, 2007 or something, 2006. Oh, no, that can't be right. Oh, they're all kind of blurring together. Anyway, they had lots of very simple questions, and I wrote those questions to the Minister of Health and said, "Okay; answer these questions if you're going to put this plan into play," and he couldn't. They couldn't. I reminded them and added new questions a couple of months later from other seniors' groups I'd met with. They still couldn't answer it. Eventually they admitted that it had been, one of those euphemistic words, put on the back burner or postponed or something or something, which, you know, is good. Admit that that was a flaming disaster and walk away from it.

Now, we heard that it was coming back. They were going to try it again. So I just wonder how many rounds we have to go. I'm reminded of a boxing match, and the government gets up there and kind of keeps punching these seniors with a kidney blow, and seniors kind of stagger around and then manage to stand back up again, and then you all go back to corners, and then they come at it again. So, you know, please, please, don't do that plan. I really don't think it's a very good one.

But please try and do some positive things around health care for seniors, and it would help if you weren't quite so hysterical about the effect that the baby boom generation is going to have on health care spending in the future. That does seem to be driving a lot of choices this government is making about health care and seniors at this point, I think, to try to stem the flow of the baby boomer bulge, which is coming.

So there are three very positive things that the government could do with pharmaceuticals if they chose to do something positive with pharmaceuticals. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Oh, well, thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In some of your comments you mentioned an extraordinary power to amend lists. We've seen this current Minister of Health fumble a lot of different files. Is there anything in here that you are concerned about in terms of the Alberta Minister of Health's power, or do you believe that the change to this legislation is more in line with giving the federal minister more power and us just copying what the federal minister has done? I'm not sure if I got that right or not. But if you could explain your concerns with the lists a little bit more, I'd appreciate it.

8:10

Ms Blakeman: Well, my understanding of the list – being in a smaller opposition party, each person is carrying a number of portfolios, as actually, I think, all of us are in opposition are right now, and you've got to divide the workload. So I was not in the briefing for Bill 29, and I did start by asking forgiveness from the Assembly if I somehow was misreading this bill, having just read the comments from the minister in introducing it and in reading the bill itself, because I don't have any briefing notes on this.

In the reading of those two things it appears that what the federal minister is going to be doing is moving from a list that was under regulation – I'm always assured by my hon. colleagues opposite that there is a process that goes along with making the regulations that support a bill. I sure hope that's happening, but that's what they tell me. So I felt that there was a bit more comfort there in how drugs got on and off the list, and off the list, partic-

ularly, is what people are concerned about. They're receiving some kind of a drug, and the government says: we're not going to give it to you anymore; we're taking it off the list. You can imagine how that's going to affect your health.

Now, as I understand it, the federal government's list is about the safety of the drug, essentially. The provincial list is about whether we're going to pay for it or not. So on and off the provincial list is whether we're going to pay; federally it's whether or not it's safe. Hey, we've made mistakes, especially when we look at secondary uses of drugs, which comes up fairly frequently. The testing is not as vigorous in the testing of secondary uses of drugs. Vioxx is one of the ones I can remember, that originally started to do one thing and then was used a lot for a secondary use – anybody remember? – and it turned out to kill people when you used it for the secondary use. So, oops, they took it off the list at that point. I would have said that they should have done more vigorous testing on the secondary use of the same drug.

My caution here is that it's not going through a regulation process. It appears to be an online registry of drugs, and the minister can through their own motion move drugs on and off that list. I'm sure that there are advisers in the department and yada, yada, blah, blah, blah, but it still is the minister on his own motion moving drugs on and off a list rather than going through a regulatory process, so that was why I raised that concern.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering, member, as you were describing the bill here: on an economic level you made this comparison to the hypothetical pharmacare federally, and you talked about the possibility of saving on a bulk buying program. I'm curious. As we're dealing with this prescription drug program, we've had a number of issues over the past several months. Would there be other benefits to expanding this to a much larger system? Or are the benefits better other than just the economics, access to different pharmaceuticals, and particularly dealing with our seniors and those with low income?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. Well, there's lots of literature out there about the benefits of a universal or national or federal or interprovincial pharmacare program beyond the economic, you know, purchasing of drugs in bulk and therefore getting a lesser price. Let's face it. The feds were able to buy Cipro, or Ontario maybe was able to buy Cipro for less money.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and all the members, for allowing my introduction. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my constituency manager, Ms Felicia Dewar. She has been working for my constituency for six months. She's very intelligent, hard working, and community oriented. She lives in my

riding, Edmonton-Manning. She raised about a hundred thousand dollars for the Brintnell park playground society. Felicia is seated in the public gallery. I ask Felicia to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce all members of the Assembly to the 831 Black Knights air cadet squadron from Leduc, your hometown. They are seated in the public gallery. Would you rise, and we will recognize you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, might I remind you that it is forbidden to take pictures in the Assembly during the proceedings. Pictures are only taken in the Assembly by permission of the Speaker, and members are usually given a courtesy notice.

Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29

Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here, of course, representing the people of Cardston-Taber-Warner and to work on their behalf and to speak for them at this time on Bill 29, Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013. I realize, of course, that this act is an attempt to align our laws and the circumstances, rules, and regulations surrounding medications with the federal changes that have just been made.

I want to thank the Minister of Health for his heavy-handed and unilateral changes to the compensation available to the pharmacists of Alberta. It's had the unintended consequence, I'm sure, of galvanizing them in their united support for the Official Opposition, so we thank you for that, and we want to let you know that we're doing our best to take advantage of that and represent them well.

A petition of over 25,000 names was presented to the minister, I believe, indicating the concern and displeasure at this unilateral action and some of the fears that some have for the viability of their business, for their jobs if they're employed by pharmacists, and by the patients, of course, particularly in rural areas, for the viability of the pharmacy and their ability to go there and receive that personalized care and attention. It's our fear and theirs that if this current government continues with this trend, which we know will only be for another two or two and a half years, it could have the impact of putting some heretofore very viable businesses into bankruptcy or forcing them to close. That would be sad, sad for them and, of course, sad for their patients.

I was one of those who participated in the rally and listened to the pharmacists who marched here. I don't think pharmacists are normally identified as the kind of people that participate in these kinds of protest rallies and marches – it's the antithesis of their nature, I would suspect – but I've never seen so many people upset. In fact, of all of the things that have come across my desk or onto my computer through e-mail or phone calls that I've received or requests to meet with me, only the situation with rural ambulances rivals the anger and frustration and disappointment,

quite frankly, that has been experienced and expressed by our pharmacists.

I think it's shabby treatment, and I think the government ought to be ashamed of itself. We know, of course, that whenever we fix the cost or adjust unilaterally the cost of something, we eventually ration the supply or reduce the availability and create shortages, and with medication this can result in health risks, complications, and even death.

I hope the minister will consider the pharmacists' concerns that were expressed in the petition and the many calls, I'm sure, that he received and also, I'm sure, that you yourselves on the government side of the House have received, too. I realize that you're not allowed to speak about that in public, but I certainly hope that in caucus you've been very vocal in sharing the concerns that have been brought to you, as I'm sure they have been. We know certainly that they have been brought to us.

8:20

I would wonder how the Health minister would feel if he were to be treated by a doctor who didn't bother to analyze, didn't listen to him as he explained his pains or complaints or the problems that he was having, who just didn't bother to even ask him, didn't order tests, didn't bother investigating thoroughly before diagnosing that his heart needed to be removed. That's how the pharmacists feel. Nobody asked them how they felt about this, how they'd feel about a 75 per cent reduction in the amount of money they could mark up the generic medication that they'd been prescribing. That 75 per cent reduction happened without much consultation and happened over a period of five years, actually four years. That's pretty shocking. I don't know very many businesses that could suffer that kind of a change without it having a serious impact on their ability to serve their customers.

Of course, this government continues to demonstrate that it's out of touch with the realities of economics and business when it decides that cuts should be made on the front lines, where the services are being delivered and administered, where the patients, or the customers if you will, are being cared for. No business would survive if it let its overhead get bloated in the way that the Health department's has and cut into its ability to serve its customers. Patients suffer. Those front-line caregivers suffer. They're frustrated, and they're overworked, and I think the system only works as well as it does because of their commitment, the way they care. But we care, too, as a party, and we hope that this minister will re-evaluate the changes that he unilaterally forced upon the pharmacists and their patients, their clients, and reconsider the drastic cuts that he made.

Thank you very much.

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

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak at second reading of Bill 29, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013.

Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, this is a fairly thin bill, but I do agree that its intent and purposes are quite valuable as far as harmonizing federal legislation with provincial legislation, which I do think is a positive step.

I would like to briefly speak about what's not included in this bill when we're talking about health care or pharmacare, the possibilities that we have before us in this province, and, if anything, to recommend to the hon. members on the opposite side of the House to seriously contemplate Alberta being a trendsetter

and being at the forefront of introducing a pharmacare plan that would be comprehensive and ensure that all Albertans have the coverage that they need and to do it in a way that is very cost-effective.

I think that when we talk about a pharmacare plan, first of all it's going to improve access for Albertans. There are many Albertans who don't have a plan or coverage, and when somebody gets sick or an illness comes up, it can be very, very damaging not only to a person's health but also to their bank account to get them the appropriate pharmaceuticals that they need. Improving access ensures that all Albertans have access to medication when they need it.

As well, it provides a sense of security for folks. I mean, this isn't a plan that's necessarily tied to a job or tied to a particular employment. Therefore, for either entrepreneurs or business owners or folks that are going out there taking risks by maybe leaving a more secure job to pursue a business, it would give them the security and confidence to know that they still have access to a pharmaceutical plan that will ensure that should they need medication, they can get it.

As well, as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Calder pointed out, I think that when we look at a pharmaceutical plan, maybe on a larger scale, especially looking nationally, dollars can be saved through bulk purchases. I think that even within the province of Alberta there would be great savings that could be passed on to consumers, to Albertans, especially our most vulnerable, our seniors who are living on fixed incomes. You take those savings and stretch them out across the country, and that number is magnified significantly.

I think, again, looking at that as an economy of scale, that would be a benefit or an incentive, one would think, for the health care ministers across the country to get together and put their heads together as far as coming up with a plan that could save Canadians many, many dollars and, again, improve their access to care and their quality of care.

The other thing that a pharmaceutical plan could do and would do because it would be regulated is that it would ensure the safety of Albertans out there, protecting Albertans from the possibility of being overprescribed medication. It would provide another safety net or oversight on that.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that there are lots of positive reasons why we should look at and why I encourage the members on the opposite side of the House to look at introducing a pharmacare strategy that would benefit all Albertans regardless of income or age or ability or disability and encourage the minister to work with his counterparts across the country to expand this to more of a federal plan, which I think would have significant benefits for all Albertans.

You know, just to touch on this as well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there are quite a few seniors in my constituency and, I would imagine, throughout the province who are concerned about what may happen in the future as far as costs of medication and drugs going up. Again, these are folks living on fixed incomes.

As well, a concern that I've been hearing very loudly lately is the concern for more and more services or medications being delisted, that were once covered that will no longer be covered. I think that's a real valid concern to have, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we can go through, you know, the timeline of five years ago, 10 years ago, and there are a number of different drugs that are no longer covered, and for some families that has left them in a bit of a situation. I want to take the time to share those concerns because it would have fit quite nicely with this bill, again looking at expanding the bill to a larger strategy.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get on the record a couple of questions that I have surrounding this bill that there will be an opportunity in Committee of the Whole to have a bit of a dialogue on with the minister. I'm curious to know what the impact will be on Albertans' prescription drug coverage and if there will be an impact. From the outset or at least from my view in looking at Bill 29 at the moment, it doesn't seem to be, but I would love to get the minister on record as far as if there will be an impact for Albertans and as well if there are going to be any costs imposed on the government or on Albertans, on either of the two groups. Those are a couple of questions that I'll definitely put to the minister.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I do support and will support this bill moving forward. Again, I wish that it was a little more comprehensive. At least, I hope that through the discussions on Bill 29 we will have a bit of a dialogue in this House about a provincial or an interprovincial health care pharmaceutical strategy.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that in the Legislature a lot of us debated the impacts that the Minister of Health's decision had on rural pharmacies. We saw, obviously, that a lot of pharmacists came to the Legislature, rallied. Many of the pharmacists there were from small towns or municipalities and knew that because of the changes they had limited opportunity to recoup revenue. They're not like a big store in the city where they can recoup revenue through other streams of revenue. I'm wondering whether or not the member can provide us with some insight into whether or not the same issues or concerns were brought forward to him in his capacity as a member in the Edmonton area. Did pharmacists in either your area or the Edmonton area approach you and put forward any concerns?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for his question. My answer is yes. Thank you for raising that point, the difference between the smaller pharmacies in rural Alberta and the larger ones in the metropolitan areas. I agree – and concerns did come forward – that there is a discrepancy in revenue streams, in what the smaller pharmacies in rural areas can do versus those in the larger cities.

I think that the point is that this bill could have addressed some of those discrepancies. I know that there are many small pharmacies throughout the province that have been affected and will continue to be affected. This would have provided an opportunity to address those discrepancies and to level the playing field for pharmacies throughout the province. We have gotten feedback from pharmacies within my constituency, in Beverly-Clareview. I have spoken with a small pharmacy owner, and I know that the Alberta NDP has been contacted by pharmacies throughout the province.

I want to thank the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for his question. I think, again, that something else to think about for all members of this House, especially the government, when we go into Committee of the Whole and debate this is looking at all the different aspects or angles or issues that could

have been addressed in a more comprehensive bill. This would have been the time and place to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the member could answer pretty much the same question I had asked the other member, coming from an urban representation, on the whole idea of this harmonization between the provincial and the federal, which I think is a good idea. If the program was expanded, what are the benefits beyond just the economics as far as providing service and quality of care, in particular for seniors on a fixed income in an urban area?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the hon. member for his question. Again, I'm going to try to come up with answers or reasons on the spot here. I think that there are a few. I mean, in addition to the economic benefits of it, you've also got benefits of oversight. You've got benefits of the delivery or the dispensation of pharmaceuticals throughout the province to ensure that, again, whether you're living in Small Town, Alberta, rural Alberta, or you're living in one of the larger cities, you have the same timely access to those drugs and medications as everyone. Again, you're leveling the playing field for Albertans throughout the province.

I think I will come back to the hon. member with a more complete answer when I put a little more thought into this.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to just raise a few points as well about Bill 29. Essentially, as we all understand, it's mostly an administrative bill, and it's being done to line up the changes that have been brought on by the changes in the federal government bill, C-38. Previously you needed a regulatory amendment to give a drug prescription status change, and this is going to simplify that in the process, which is, in a way, a good thing as long as the power is used well. I think we can all agree that that'll be beneficial.

In short, though, again, it's really aligning ourselves with the changes on the federal side. So we had to make a change. That raises a question for me. If Bill C-38 had not been passed, would we even be talking or debating this bill in this House? I think there's an opportunity here that has been lost, that we could have used this bill here in this House to actually make some positive changes to the Pharmacy and Drug Act.

You know, dispensing fees haven't increased for pharmacists and pharmacies for many, many years. I know that there have been some preliminary discussions about doing some increases, but the amount that's being proposed, Mr. Speaker, is nowhere near what pharmacists think they should receive for the work that they do. Especially when you take into consideration, again, the number of years that it's been since an increase and you factor in inflation, it just doesn't make a whole lot of sense. What happens is that because pharmacists are reliant on the dispensing fees and the markup on the products they sell, that has a direct impact on their profitability.

Most of the pharmacies that are being directly impacted to the biggest extent are the small pharmacies. Typically those are small businesses. You may have a one-store operation. You may have

an ownership that is inclusive of two stores, three stores, maybe a few more, but again you're usually dealing in a lot of cases with small business. Unfortunately, not dealing with the pressures of small business having their fees controlled by government regulations, we are, again, hindering the ability for small business to actually prosper out there, possibly grow, to increase their ability to improve on their services and better perform to meet the needs of the patients, which is the overall requirement and desire of pharmacists.

The services that have been added to the pharmacy service structure have not even come close to recovering the difference between what their revenue was and what they've lost. Unfortunately, as much as some people think, you know, of going to their pharmacist to get their shot, to have their blood pressure checked, to have their medication reviewed, pharmacists are doing a lot of that for no charge. Or they were. Now they're being told that maybe they should charge. I'm not sure how that's going to be dealt with by Alberta Health Services as well as how the general public will feel going into a place for information that they used to get for free and now they're going to be faced with talking to somebody, maybe not even their pharmacist, and having to sign paperwork, go through forms, and find out all of a sudden that that free service is no longer free, that there is a charge. You know, it could have a negative impact on that as well.

Pharmacists are the gatekeepers to me and to a lot of doctors and a lot of patients. They are that intermediary person who does the medication review to make sure that if that individual is maybe seeing more than one doctor – possibly they have a family doctor, maybe they see different doctors at walk-ins, or maybe they don't have a doctor and have to go to emergency. When they go to their pharmacist, there's an opportunity for the pharmacist to actually review their medication history, and it's their job to make sure that there is no contraindication between medications.

You know, a lot of times individuals will go in to see their doctor, and if they don't disclose all the medications they're on or don't remember all the medications they're on, a prescription could be issued and there could be some huge, huge negative effects by the drugs that they take if they do not work well together. Pharmacists are, like I said, the gatekeeper there. They are that line of defence between the patient and the doctor to make sure that what the doctor is prescribing for them actually is going to benefit them and not put their health in jeopardy.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, pharmacists are working longer and harder, and that's no different than any other front-line service in the health industry. They're caring workers, and they're doing this because, number one, this is what they want to do. This is what they got into the business for. They feel that they have something really positive to offer the patients, and I think that's critical. You need to be there for the right reasons. You don't want them to be there just to build a very viable business and something that they're going to basically get rich off. At the same time, they are a business, and they do have to be profitable. If they're not, they will not be there. In some cases pharmacists have had to let staff go. They've had to reduce the hours of staff. They've had to cut benefits. They've had to cut hours. They've had to work longer themselves.

As a small-business person myself in the past I know that as the owner, when things do get tough, you have to take on more of that role yourself. They're doing that. At the same time, this is going backwards. In a time when pharmacists are urgently needed in the health care system, you certainly do not want to put more pressure on this group of individuals to put more hours in, add stress to

their lives, and basically, you know, have a negative impact on their lives as well.

You know, I think the worst outcome that could happen is that if there aren't positive changes made, the pharmacies will close. That would be a sad thing. You would actually lose a service to your patient. Where that patient would go to get that service from that point on is unknown. That's, again, something that could have been dealt with in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the government had proposed to save \$90 million by reducing the generic drug price from 35 per cent to 18 per cent. Unfortunately, that price for generics has decreased from 75 per cent to 18 per cent since 2009, and that does have a direct impact on pharmacies, who make a small markup on what the cost is. Again, that is also an issue. As a small-business owner you're actually dictated to as to what your markup can be and the requirement you have as a pharmacy owner as to the drugs you need to carry. Some drugs are not very expensive. Some drugs are very expensive, and to have a small markup on these drugs is a detriment to their ability to perform their service.

I had one pharmacist send me a letter. Basically, his concern was to the Minister of Health, and he was saying:

Due to the government's announcement in Budget 2013, and the effects it will have [on] the pharmacy profession, I regret to advise you that we will be forced to close one of our locations in Medicine Hat. The staff at our Medical Arts location has tried their best to replace the severe funding cuts imposed by the government with services offered in the Pharmacy New Practice Framework, but there is no way they can come close to replacing the current revenue reductions and with the next cuts their fate is sealed.

On April 11 all their locations joined other pharmacists in Alberta by closing for two hours so that they could answer questions that customers had about the changes to the pharmacy plan and the negative impacts that the government's actions would have.

They will be informed of how the government's actions have caused one of our locations to close and how availability, accessibility, and service may be affected at all pharmacies in the province. We will also have a petition available for them to sign, that will be presented to the Legislature."

That was from Joe Hansen, a pharmacist actually in Medicine Hat.

We did, actually, out of Medicine Hat have about a hundred and fifty of those letters presented to us at our office, and I was able to table them in the Legislature.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, really because it is a housekeeping bill – and that's the disappointing part – there's not much here to oppose or support, which, again, is a lost opportunity, in my mind. Supporting empty legislation is easy although not beneficial overall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the comments that the hon. member talked about and I found quite interesting are about the fact that we could have used this piece of legislation to actually make things better rather than have it as a relatively purely administrative amendment to the existing legislation. You know, some of the things that the Wildrose had suggested after the Health minister plowed through with major decisions that were to impact our health care system and the price for generic drugs, some of the solutions we came up with, included the ability to extend the washout period to 90 days to allow for the full recovery of costs on inventory, to identify what drug shortages could occur with the changes and modify the pricing structure to ensure all

patients could continue to receive the drugs they needed without interruption, to extend the prescription transition allowance for at least two years to allow an adequate period of time to move to the new funding model for pharmacy, and to negotiate in good faith with pharmacists to reach a long-term solution that would ensure the viability of local pharmacists, that puts patients first. The last solution, the idea of negotiating in good faith with our pharmacists, I thought, of course, would go without saying.

It's unfortunate that this bill does not in fact deal with the underlying problems that were created by the Health minister last year. All it's doing is corresponding with a change to some federal legislation and applying it here provincially. The hon. member talked about how we could potentially come up with solutions in this legislation. Why not, Mr. Speaker, have a bill, a substantive bill, to fix the problems, not some bill that's, you know, two pages long with two sections? Why not have a substantive bill that would actually fix some of the problems that were created by the Health minister last year? Some of those problems, of course, included the effect on local pharmacists. It was estimated that the average pharmacy would lose thousands and thousands of dollars if the time period for selling off existing inventory was not extended.

We know from talking to pharmacists that they were not consulted in good faith, that the Health minister refused to discuss his changes with them. That kind of unilateral decision-making process never works. There should be a consultation process. Weigh all sides. Talk to different interested parties to ensure that we come up with the best solutions. You know, the hon. member talked about having this bill be more substantive and actually effect change in this province. Instead, what we end up with is a two-page bill with four sections, and one of them is a coming-into-force section, which says that this bill is going to come into force December 19 of this year. That's what this bill is. Rather than having a detailed, substantive change to our legislation so that we could actually fix the problems that were created by the Health minister himself, instead he's just coming forward with a rather minor bill that's not going to actually fix things.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the hon. member. You know, the Wildrose came up with a four-point plan to fix the changes that the Health minister put forward. I guess my question is whether or not he believes that when legislation comes forward, it should actually be substantive and actually fix major problems in this province rather than be just a minor amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

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

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member.

Pharmacy is a highly regulated industry, and I think that's one of the things that could have been addressed in this bill. As was mentioned, we suggested a 90-day washout period. Because there is so low a margin in the inventory that pharmacists carry, the idea was to stretch that out so that they had the ability to take existing inventory, that it's up to them to stock and pay for – they own that inventory – and to give them 90 days to sell that out the door.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The time has expired.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a long road to get to this point with this bill. It is disappointing that it's just a house-

keeping bill that harmonizes our federal rules and regulations with the provincial, because it could have done so much more, as you've heard from some of the other speakers.

I had to kind of chuckle when one of the members brought the example of the Minister of Health having his heart removed. I think it's a good thing to note tonight that hopefully, if the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act passes, we'll have something there that can help the minister out and have that transplant done on time. That would be good. The problem is getting him the proper medication and getting it in a timely fashion and making sure that it is the right medication.

I will tell you this. The road here was extremely disappointing. The rural pharmacists, unlike ever before, united and then had to not just lobby this government but had to protest to be heard. That's extremely unusual. They're not that class of people that is generally considered activist by any stretch of the imagination. As a matter of fact, in many ways it's the first time I've ever seen pharmacists actually political. They're usually taking care of business in health care, and in my communities – and I say communities because when I look at my riding that I represent, if I count not just the incorporated communities but those hamlets and summer villages, I have 37 of those.

People who live even in the hamlets consider that their town, their community. All these communities, all these smaller ones, come to the incorporated towns like Rimbey, Rocky Mountain House, Sundry, Eckville. This is where they come to get their pharmaceutical drugs. The pharmacist isn't just the pharmacist. They are a vital part of the community that keeps the community not just operating, but it is also a social part of the community. It's where a lot of our seniors do meet. A lot of the townspeople do meet in these pharmacies, and a lot of information is passed back and forth. There's a lot going on, and the need for our seniors to have these pharmacies is not just essential in our community, but it's life affecting.

So I was somewhat puzzled when this first came to rise. I say "rise" because the questions came initially to my office. I started to look at what the minister was proposing, and the next thing you know, I had pharmacists knocking on the door, and I had meetings with pharmacists. We became friends, and we got to know each other by first name. As they laid out all the inconsistencies, what I discovered is that the minister said he consulted, which is usually the case – I understand that – but clearly there was something missing because all of the pharmacists were saying that they weren't being consulted.

There was, as we would describe in this Chamber, a different interpretation of the facts. The reality is that when you have one party in a discussion saying that they're not being consulted, I think there's an incredible weight that has to go to that party, the weight of what they're saying, that something is missing here. So even if the minister thought he was consulting, certainly when hundreds and then thousands of pharmacists spoke up, it had to have been a clue that something was desperately wrong with the consultation process. Desperately. That's what we heard all across the spectrum.

It became emotional because many of these pharmacists really saw where they were going to be closing their doors, and what they couldn't find was that venue to be heard. They saw the disruption that was going to happen in these communities if they had to close their doors. That's significant. There are certain pieces of infrastructure in every community that make that community alive and active.

Everybody knows we need schools. I might even ask for one in this speech. Everybody needs schools because that's where the young families come. That's where they locate to. You need

medical facilities, either the hospital or the doctors' clinics, because that's where the seniors need to go. That helps your community grow. It used to be that you had to have a post office. That was absolutely essential although Internet now has interfered, but our post office is still quite active.

There are certain infrastructure components to every community that help the community grow. One of those is the pharmacy, without a doubt. That's part of our medical care system and plays a very important role, and the pharmacists themselves play a very important role in our community as trusted servants of our health care system in many ways. Certainly, I would put our pharmacists on the same level as our doctors in dispensing medical advice or consultation dealing with their specialty, which is prescription drugs, and the seniors and other residents in our communities have come to value that tremendously. To have them under this pressure of thinking that they were going to end up closing their doors or relocating elsewhere, which would leave our community without a pharmacy, was extremely distressful, to say the least.

It took every effort, not just from opposition parties but from various communities. We had the pharmacists that did sign the petition, but we had mayors that came forward and said: "Hey, wait a minute. Our pharmacists have spoken to us. We need this settled. We need someone to pay attention to the problem." We couldn't get that. We couldn't get that for the longest time. That's not just unfortunate; that's unreasonable. That shouldn't happen.

Fast-forward to today. We have a harmonizing bill for prescription drugs that sort of aligns us with the federal legislation. But what more does it do? That's something that I think is an opportunity that's missed, but the nice part is that this government is the master of its own destiny. It can change this. It can submit another bill. It certainly has the power to correct it. It also has the power to improve it. I would argue that what we need to do with this bill is improve it, and we can improve it in a number of different ways.

Yes, we can come forward with amendments to improve it, or we can actually come forward with another bill and look to make some changes. I for one wouldn't even necessarily say that we have to rush to do that. I would like to see the consultation process actually listen to the pharmacists, find out what is important in each and every community for how best to dispense these services, what drugs are really needed and required, how to save money. I don't know anyone that can tell you better how to save money than those front-line workers. Certainly that's what these pharmacists are. They are front-line workers.

From where I sat, where I am in this House today, when I heard the pharmacists' issues, their problems coming to this point, one of the things that I noticed is all the people who stepped up, stepped up under the mantra of: "We care. We care enough about our seniors that we will go to bat for you. We care enough about our communities that we're going to fight to keep our pharmacists." It is that caring that, I think, provided the energy to continue. You may remember that during question period it got quite passionate sometimes. It certainly did when some of the pharmacists showed up, and to have people in the medical frocks up in the gallery is a very unusual sight for this Assembly. It shouldn't happen when we get right down to it, but it did.

9:00

What we can do is improve. I would suggest to this government that they undertake that exercise and look at the programs dealing with our pharmacies, look at not just the drugs that are on the list but at what we can do better to improve.

I would argue that there are numerous opportunities not just to improve the services but to save costs. I would like to think – and

I say this with some confidence – that all the members on the government side would love to save costs, too. That's the reasonable thing to do. If we can look at a program and come up with a better program that provides a better service at a lower cost, why wouldn't we support it? The opportunity is there.

That is one of the side benefits of the disruption that happened this last spring. When these pharmacists did come forward, there were a number of different suggestions on how to make the whole system better. I'm not sure anyone heard that. It's certainly something that this government can continue to move down the road on and say: hey, wait a minute; let's pull this back a little bit. I'm not saying we don't pass this bill – I'm going to be voting for this bill – but we can do better. We can actually make this better. All we have to do is get those stakeholders who are really in the know and start looking pragmatically at those suggestions and see what we can do better, see how we can save costs, and see how we can increase these services to these communities.

I will tell you that there may be differences between the urban communities and the rural communities, particularly when you deal with the number of issues, but it seems to me that there are a lot of similarities with this issue. There are a tremendous amount of similarities. We ought to be able to find mechanisms and programs that we can apply to both the major urban centres, the smaller cities, and, of course, those smaller towns. There's nothing wrong with being flexible, making whatever necessary changes you have to make to make each more efficient. That's how we make a system that works, where we can have a discussion or at least the pride that we care about what we're giving to our communities, we care about what we're doing for our seniors, we care about each other, and we care about the health services that we provide all of our citizens.

This bill falls short, but it's the right step in the right direction. No one should be satisfied with just this bill. We should be satisfied going further and taking this to a different level, a better level of providing services to our communities, to our seniors, to the people of low income, and making this a viable health care service to all of our communities.

With that, I will thank the Health minister for finally coming around, and I wish him well in consulting more in the future. I would hope he would do a lot more consulting. I would hope Alberta Health Services would consult to a greater degree so we can better provide our services for health care at a lower cost. As some of the other members have stated earlier, the opportunity is there. There are a number of different ways that we can do this. It's just having the courage to move forward and having the open mind to listen and be willing to act on those suggestions. These pharmacists have the ability to actually provide those suggestions. It is more of a collaborative effort, but it starts by listening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Just a reminder that it allows for brief comments or questions to the member.

Mr. Saskiw: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question relates to the process. Here in Alberta we sit the fewest number of days in the Legislature. Bills are introduced, and then immediately we go into evening sittings, you know, one day after a bill is introduced. You have opposition parties who have to do extensive research on many, many bills. My question to the hon. member is: would it not be better to extend the number of days we sit in the Legislature, make sure that there's sufficient time and resources to thoroughly go through the bills rather than going immediately into evening sittings?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, to answer the question, it is most definitely, yes. Let me explain. It makes sense, and here is a perfect example in this bill. We received the bill. The problem I have is that I can't get a hold of my pharmacist right away. For me to travel from the north end of my riding to the south end takes me just about one hour and 45 minutes, and that's doing 110 K. For me to get to the various pharmacies and speak to the pharmacists – I can call, but you can imagine that they're very busy people, too. So trying to get their input in the short amount of time that a bill is introduced before it ends up in second reading and Committee of the Whole, I don't even have enough opportunity to allow them – they're not lawmakers, but the fact is that they want to have some input. So as they read the bill, they have a learning curve to go through. Reading legislation is not what they do. They want to know how it actually applies to the services they provide.

My ability to consult with my own constituents, these professionals who are highly educated, is somewhat limited because of the schedule we keep in this House. It does not allow for proper research. It varies from bill to bill. Some bills allow us a little bit of time. Some bills – and I think we discussed one earlier – don't allow any time for any type of research or consultation. That was earlier today. On something like this, when you're dealing with a health care service, you're dealing with the pharmacists, who are an important component in the daily lives, particularly, of – and I'll relate to my own experience with the seniors of my communities. This is significant, and there's no time to actually get their input to find out how it's going to affect these seniors, how it's going to affect the care and the services that these pharmacists provide to these seniors.

What we end up doing is hoping we get it right. We look for language that will maybe jump out at us on some of this legislation, but if it doesn't necessarily just sort of jump off the pages at us, it's easy to miss something. A professional who is actually a front-line provider could make suggestions like: wait a minute; this is something you need to dig deeper in.

We look at this, and we say that it aligns or harmonizes the prescription drug program with the federal changes, and we take that in good faith, but I did get a hold of one of the pharmacists by phone, and he just didn't have time to take a look at it. He needed time to call the pharmacy association because that's where they get their information from. Again, the pharmacists like to talk amongst themselves. We do know that we have a large organization in this province that represents the pharmaceutical industry. But also in my local area we have a number of pharmacists who unite together in little enclaves, I'll call them, where they deal with the local issues, they share information, as professionals do, and they help keep the information flowing.

Again, here we are. We have a bill. We're into evening sittings, and this is a very short session in many ways, as the schedule indicates. We need time to consult. It's interesting that we have to take the minister's word that he consulted. We don't know that. We just have to take his word because we can't even hear from the other side that have met with the minister or the minister's staff to actually have some input.

It does make it difficult, but that difficulty does not have to exist. We sit the shortest, I think, of most every government in Canada. I'm not sure if there's anyone that sits shorter than us. This legislation is no less important. I will tell you that this government takes great pride in talking about how fast we're growing, how well we're doing in comparison to other areas, but

on a governance level the speed at which we move legislation through is a recipe for mistakes. I think we've seen that in a number of pieces of legislation, and that's why we end up with a lot of amended bills, because we don't take time to discuss it, and then once they become law, we end up having to hear from people who need changes.

9:10

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers to second reading?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

Bill 31 Protecting Alberta's Environment Act

[Debate adjourned October 29]

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

Mr. Anglin: I think I'll go after.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my thanks to the critic for the Official Opposition for letting me jump in front here. Bill 31: so much anticipation, so little product. Let's just review here what we're trying to do in Alberta and those important words around what we're doing with our industry and our environment, climate change. We're supposed to be producing and having the government put incentives and disincentives where needed in place so that we have less CO₂ being produced. Every time the government trumpets that they're going to be doing something wonderful, I have hopes. I am the eternal optimist. I have hopes that we are going to see a great leap forward in how the government deals with increasing amounts of CO₂ and corresponding toxins that go into our air, earth, and water.

Just a few general comments to start in second reading debate for Bill 31, Protecting Alberta's Environment Act. One, where's the less pollution stuff? Where is the "We're going to try and hit a reduction to 2005 pollution levels by 2020"? Hello? We seem to have forgotten that that's what we were all trying to do.

Another general point is conservation of the use of water. There's nothing here that would deal with that in particular.

All of this is to say that, yes, this bill is setting up an agency. But there are so many other things that the government needs to have done at the same time or in advance of this. It's very frustrating to watch the government repeat a pattern over and over again. We saw it in health, we've seen it in children's services, and now we're seeing it in the environment. That is that pattern of tinkering with the administration of the delivery of a service but not actually improving the delivery of a service.

What was the problem we were having in Alberta? The problem was that we couldn't tell how much were polluting. We couldn't tell how much CO₂ was being released into the air or what kind of toxins were going onto the land or into the water. Why? Well, because our monitoring was a little shaky. Every time we raised this, the government duly got up – God bless them – and trotted out the same story about how bitumen occurs naturally in the Athabasca River. Well, that's true. It does, but it had nothing to do with the province's lack of strength in monitoring anything in this province. Eventually the government did admit that, well, no, they

actually didn't have a world-class monitoring system, but they were going to get one. I suppose this agency is part of that promise.

But, you know, it's not. It's tinkering with the administration of this, but I don't see where it's actually strengthening the monitoring program that we have to be able to tell what the cumulative effects are, which is the other area that this government has just totally tanked on.

I remember back in the old days, before the 2012 election and the 2008 election. You know, I was questioning the then minister, who was the Member for Medicine Hat, who's plowing along trying to justify what the government was doing. They were terrible at monitoring, and they just kept trotting out the same bad stories, and we got no better delivery of service. For any of the agencies that we were funding or that we did have set up – there were those WAP, water advisory panels – the funding on them was getting to be less and less every year. So we weren't doing a better job; we were doing a worse job every year.

The other pattern I see this government involved in – and now we see it specifically in this – is that they really don't want to talk to too many people. They like to be able to have one group that they can talk to, give a direction to, and walk away. The idea that they have to go out and talk to a whole bunch of little groups or a whole bunch of not-for-profits or a whole bunch of agencies: they really don't like that. If we could just get everybody in a box and talk to one person or one agency, that would be terrific. I'm seeing some of that pattern coming through in Bill 31.

The last general statement is around devolving government responsibility and then a question about authority to other agencies. Boy. I saw it in the first term I was here, with the delegated administrative organizations. I'm now going back and looking at those organizations with a very critical eye, and frankly, they're coming up short, and the government that's responsible for them is coming up short. There are a number of other agencies which we've just examined through the Conflicts of Interest Act review, and they've come up short.

Overall the government tends to set up agencies it devolves responsibilities to and then step back. And when you ask a question in question period and say – and for years they did this. You'd say: well, you know, Minister, tell us why Capital health made this decision. The minister would put up his hands in horror and say: "I have no idea. That was done by Capital health. Go ask them." Well, come on. Of course the government is ultimately responsible. They're funding the health system. They are constitutionally required to do so. So don't hold your hands up in mock horror and tell me to go and ask somebody else. Ultimately, the Minister of Health was responsible or the Minister of Children's Services, in this case the Minister of Environment. So we have once more devolved a responsibility that the government wasn't doing very well.

Maybe this is their attempt to do it better. I don't know. Devolve it out to another agency. And, boy, the first time the minister stands up and says, "Don't ask me that question; go and ask" – wait a minute; let me get it right – "the Alberta environment monitoring evaluation and reporting agency because they make the decisions on that," I will leap to my feet and scream in horror in this House. I really will. The Speaker is looking alarmed that I might actually do that. But, you know, honestly, how many times are we going to put up with that before we call the government on it? I'm calling you on it now. Please don't do that.

Now, let me talk specifics about this bill. By the way, I had the strangest briefing. This government's concept of briefing is sliding toward oblivion, if I might put it that way, Mr. Speaker. I mean, I had a letter from the Minister of Municipal Affairs that seemed to

stand for a briefing, and I thought: well, that's nice, but I could've just read the bill. For this one, where I got a briefing for Bill 31, they sent a bureaucrat who really knew what he was talking about and two young men. There was no three-column document. There was no paper at all. I said: "Why is this so difficult? Give me the paper, at least something to write on, for God's sake." Oh. Well, no, no. No, that wasn't available. Hey? You don't have three-column documents anymore? When did that start? I'm pretty sure they did.

9:20

You know, there have been a number of other dissolutions, the slow eroding of the concept of these briefings to the opposition members, and, well, I wouldn't forecast anything dire, but you never know what will happen when government defaults on its agreement.

Let me talk specifically about the problems and omissions and strange things that I find in this bill. One, there are no timelines. There's no reference to a timeline. So when they say that they're going to report, it doesn't say when they're going to report. What? You know, they and the minister are supposed to decide on when the reporting is going to happen. Well, later on it does talk about an annual report, but are we to take it that everything they do comes out in an annual report and that's it? Is there no immediate reporting? Is there no quarterly reporting? They're supposed to be monitoring. They're telling us this information is going to be readily available. Well, I asked. It's not open data, so it's not that readily available, and there's no timeline. Big omission.

Secondly – and I'm just running through in order here – there is no criteria for the board appointments. As I asked the briefing staff, do you not require people to have something to do with the monitoring of toxins or pollution or whatever we want to call it in Alberta on this agency? Well, no. I said: so you could have seven ballerinas and an engineer appointed to this board? They said: well, yes. Really? You know, we probably need to fix that, and I will bring an amendment forward on that one when we get to Committee of the Whole. So no criteria for who gets appointed to this board.

Now, the government may stand up and say: oh, yes, but that's under what we used to call agencies, boards, and commissions. There's now another acronym called APAGA, I think, which does say that you're supposed to appoint people to the board that are qualified to sit on it. But reading this legislation, what do they expect? Who are they saying is qualified? Nothing is laid out here, so there's no criteria for that. Big omission.

There are all kinds of powers that are being granted, but then they can put limits on it. It says – let me just double-check that – in section 7 that they can grant powers to the CEO and the chair, but that will be done later, and we don't know what they are. Later it says that, well, they can put limitations on things. That's a push me, pull me. We'll give you powers later. We won't tell you right now. But we can also put limits on things. I expect that is meant to be that they can put limits at any point in time, but you know, it's not incredibly clear.

Okay. Some strange things in here. They empower this agency to borrow money. Why? Why would this agency, that's doing monitoring, that is guaranteed to get \$50 million a year from the industry – why on earth are they empowering this agency to borrow money? For what purpose? That I would really like to know because very few other agencies get to borrow money. Municipalities do, but they've got a limit on it. This doesn't even say there's a limit on the amount they can borrow. So that's very curious.

Then in the next section it says that we can decide to provide departmental assistance to the agency, which is quite common with these devolved agencies. They'll be assigned a department that will process their cheques and help with their human resources and that kind of thing. They act as an administrative arm for them. That's very common. But, gee, you can borrow money, but we'll also give you money to help run your organization, and you get the \$50 million guaranteed for the oil sands, by the way, or that area only, and you can borrow money. What?

They can also acquire real property. Now, why is an agency being empowered to acquire real property? I'd like the answer to that one, too. They can borrow, they can also get assistance from the government, and they can acquire real property. Why? Why would an agency like this need to be able to acquire real property? That is not a standard clause in the typical, you know, agency, board, or commission language.

The criteria for the scientific advisory panel. Again, it says nowhere in here that they have to be scientists or they have to be recognized by their professional group or they have to be peer published or anything that designates that a science advisory council actually has to have scientists on it. I have chem 31. I could be on this committee. That's insane. I mean, not the thought of me being on the committee or the thought of me passing chem 31, which I did. But, truly, where's the criteria for this? I expected very high standards given the hullabaloo we've had about this agency, and we get exactly no criteria for who is to be appointed to a scientific panel. What are you thinking?

They're also indemnified in a way that I don't recall seeing in other legislation. If it's there, please show it to me. Generally there's a clause that says that if the staff is doing what they're supposed to be doing, you can't sue them for doing their regular job. But this is going way past that. You know, it's an entire section. They can indemnify a present or former director. Why former? So somebody can't sue them after the fact? Well, they should be covered under the original indemnification. Why are you indemnifying former directors or agencies? They're indemnifying people who act at the request of the agency, employees or former employees, heirs, and legal representatives of these people. What? And this is for everything.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I didn't even get through my list.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend the Wildrose Party met down in Red Deer, and we passed a couple of policy suggestions. One was that we would reduce greenhouse gases by advancing, implementing, and co-operating on technology, research, conservation, and alternative renewable energy sources. The other was to ensure that Alberta's goals and objectives were on par with the national and international greenhouse gas and air pollution protocols and standards. Now, we did that because we listened to Albertans.

Here we are today dealing with a bill called the Protecting Alberta's Environment Act, but it doesn't do that. It doesn't add any more protections whatsoever to the environmental laws that we have today. It's actually a misnomer to call it a protection act because there's nothing about the bill that protects. What it does is that it creates an agency, again, an independent agency, something akin to Alberta Health Services. And how'd that work out? Well, it didn't work out too good, and we're constantly having a problem, where we're trying to fix our health care as a result.

We have a unique situation in this province. We are an oil and gas province. Some people say we are a carbon extraction province. There's no question that we are a resource extraction province, and we're amazingly wealthy in our resources. Nobody denies that. What we want to do is deal with that issue of resource extraction, our nonrenewable resource, but we want to do it in the most responsible environmental way that we possibly can.

Now, that's not just common sense. I mean, it is common sense, but it's more than that. It's good for our industry when we do it responsibly. I know all the members here have had a chance to consult with some of the industry members. They have to do certain things to show their customers that they're responsible because that's what their customers want. So here we are trying to build pipelines, trying to get our resources to market, and what we're hearing is that our customers on the other end want to see some steps taken to protect and improve the environment, and that's really important.

9:30

Over and over our government tells us what a wonderful job they've been doing, but here we are now with another massive change. When I had an opportunity to call some of my industry contacts, one of the first things that had jumped off the page at me – and I'll leave the name anonymous for fear of any retribution for the individual. [interjections] Oh, please, please, don't heckle and say that there's never been retribution in this province. The reality is that people need to protect their jobs and not be critical of the government or the company they work for. There is a little bit of logic to that.

What is absolutely important is: why don't we have a program where we get some sort of 100 per cent goal as our target that we would be transparent and we would be forthright in the programs that we undertake to improve our monitoring of the environment, to improve the protection of the environment? I mean, let's take a look at some of the problems that have existed. The minister is quick to say how wonderful things are, but just dealing with the issue of greenhouse gases, I don't think there's a member in this House that doesn't think we need to reduce this. I know industry is absolutely on board a hundred per cent. They know we need to reduce greenhouse gases. They want to. They want to for our customers.

We had an absolutely great opportunity that presents itself to our economy, where a company decides to turn off two coal generators. They issue the notice of termination, and the government intervenes and forces them to invest nearly a hundred million dollars to turn them back on, and they will only stay on for a couple of years. We don't even require them to adhere to newer technologies because what we're asking them to do is just turn on what they've turned off. That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense because what that does is that it keeps sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter, mercury, never mind the greenhouse gases. We had an opportunity to get ahead of the curve, and the government reversed what industry was trying to do. I don't understand that. It didn't make sense, but it is.

In the meantime, what we have is Alberta saying that we want to reduce greenhouse gases, but our actual greenhouse gases have increased 46 per cent since 1990. We haven't done a good job of it.

There are other issues surrounding the environment where we've done a very poor job, and I don't get why. Nothing in this bill shows us that we're going to do anything about it. One of them is groundwater mapping. We haven't done any groundwater mapping, and for years we've been asking about groundwater

mapping. The interesting thing about groundwater mapping is that our industry has done it for us. Every time they drill, they're mapping the groundwater. They collect the data, but it's all proprietary, so the government doesn't get that data. I don't understand the philosophy behind that because it's readily available. We could do that easily by regulation and protect the proprietary interests of the various companies. What the government needs to know is what's happening to those aquifers. There's nothing in this bill that says that this is going to be protected.

The enforcement action of Alberta environment in reality has been nonexistent. The Bilozer family in the minister's own riding is a perfect example. She knows who I'm talking about. The Bilozer family had their property, their quarter section, basically polluted by Imperial Oil. Now, that's not in question. There have been four environmental enforcement orders issued over the last 20 years against Imperial Oil. Imperial Oil doesn't debate this. They admit it. They've admitted it before. The problem is that there has been no enforcement. Nobody has actually tried to make Imperial Oil clean it up, and no one understands why.

I had a chance to talk to our new single Energy Regulator, a nice man, very competent. When I brought up this one example of where it's not a disputable item – we know the pollution took place, we know the company has admitted it has taken place, we know there have been four enforcements orders, yet nothing has ever happened – the new Energy Regulator, the new CEO, said that he was quite familiar with the case and that's one of the problems of Alberta environment, that there's very little in the form of enforcement. We could have put something in this bill where we could help people like this, but we didn't.

There's nothing in this legislation that deals with the issue of disturbed lands when it comes to reclamation. By the minister's own calculations there are roughly 51,000 hectares in this province of disturbed lands that will require reclamation at some point in time. According to the mine financial security program guide the ministry says that it will cost about \$75,000 per hectare to reclaim this land. Now, that's just an estimate out of the ministry, but if you do the math, with the amount of money that the ministry has collected as security, we are about \$56,000 short per hectare, or roughly \$400 million short, of what we need to reclaim this land. And there's nothing in the legislation that actually addresses this issue.

One of our major pipeline companies was just found the other day – of 125 pumping stations in this province, 117 of them are in noncompliance with the National Energy Board and our current environmental regulations. That's unacceptable. That's absolutely unacceptable. So what's being done to bring them into compliance? How they got that many out of compliance is another question.

CNRL has been ordered – I'm sorry. Up in the Cold Lake region their Primrose oil sands project: it's burping out of the ground – it's a great way to describe it – and everyone is caught trying to figure out what happened. Well, actually, when you talk to some of the geologists who want to talk off record, they say that they've known since 2009 that this could be a problem because the caprock, the layer that is supposed to be above where you frack, was not, I'm going to say, consistent. So it is on the same venue as the BP issue down in the Gulf. There were people prior to that disaster down there that had warned that it was not going right out on that oil rig. One of the drill rig operators basically told his wife that he thought he might die on this rig the way they were operating, and sure enough he did. We have that same situation dealing with CNRL. There are geologists up there to whom this is not a surprise that this has happened.

The thing is that when you protect the environment – what our industry wants, what the public wants are clear, concise environmental laws that are enforceable and consistent, that everyone understands and everyone can go by. We don't have that, and this was an opportunity to have that.

What we're creating is this separate agency, an arm's-length agency. But we know this government doesn't do that with arm's-length agencies. They haven't demonstrated that yet. I'll try to keep an open mind that this government will demonstrate it with this one, but I'm not expecting it. I watched what happened with Alberta Health Services. There's no arm's length there. I watched what happened with the old EUB and with the AUC when Bill 50 was brought forward. There was no arm's length. The government intervened.

Now all of a sudden we're talking about being transparent, we're talking about making the data public. Yet we have Justice Marceau calling what this government did a direct apprehension of bias, when they disallowed participants, intervenors, the opportunity to participate in a hearing. Now, if that was the first one, maybe we could understand it, but it's not. It's a continuation of a number of rulings, EUB versus Lavesta being another one in 2009, where the government was found guilty of the apprehension of bias.

We have a track record of cover-up and bias in the whole process, and there's nothing in the bill that says that we're going to address that issue. If we're going to prove to the international market that we're responsible, that we're going to do what's right, I don't think we can any longer say that words are good enough. We have to show it by action. There has to be something, not just the legislation, but the legislation has to be able to have some teeth to it, where it's enforceable and it's fair and it's just. This doesn't say that. What it says is that we will create this independent board. We know we're going to finance it up to a certain point, but we have no idea what's going to happen in the future because there's no financing mechanism for it.

9:40

The crazy part is that there are no qualifications or criteria, as was pointed out, on who can be on this board. That doesn't make sense. That doesn't make sense at all. If you appoint political friends, they're still going to have to hire experts to understand what the heck is going on. So we'll balloon the agency, and we'll add more money, and we'll hire more people, but is it going to do anything that we can't do now? There's nothing in this bill that says that we're going to do anything different. That's what's missing.

It's interesting. We're constantly hit with this news. It gives us a black eye environmentally, particularly in the international markets. Now we know about the mercury levels in the birds' eggs near Lake Athabasca, and this is by the joint oil sands monitoring agency, which, by the way, goes away when we pass this bill. There's going to be something taking its place. That's significant when that mercury level rises. We need to understand. I'm not saying that that's coming from any particular place, but what I am saying is that that is telling us something is wrong, and we need to discover why that is happening. So where in this bill does it say anything about how we're going to change to investigate and to come to the solutions for protecting our environment?

These are the indicators, and I just listed a few here. There are quite a few that just continue all the time in Alberta. In my view, some of it is avoidable. One of the things in maritime law is that it says that there are no such things as accidents. They're not accidents because they're preventable. What they do in maritime law is try to find out how to prevent . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: One of the concerns that I have with this bill is the section that allows this new agency to write its own conflict of interest laws, which does seem like a tiny conflict of interest, by the way, to write its own conflict of interest laws or regulations to abide by. Again, having sat on the recent Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, what's become apparent is that there's a complete hodgepodge of conflict of interest rules that govern these agencies. In a number of cases they are allowed to go by their own rules or by the rules that appear under APEGGA or under the government employee standards rules, and none of them are as strong as what appears in the Conflicts of Interest Act. And I have criticized that act for not being strong enough.

Does the member have anything to comment on around the conflict of interest regulations, given that this agency will be, you know, moving in a circle that can very much engender all kinds of conflict of interest in the oil and gas sector? They're handling potentially a lot of money, and what they do is going to apply to a very wide area and have a wide influence or application. Could the member comment on that?

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for asking. I think that's problematic, and I'll tell you why. The industry absolutely needs a level of confidence that the agency is independent and that it's credible. Perception of credibility is not what we believe or may want to believe. It's what their customers absolutely expect. What I worry about in that one section is that it will allow certain industry members who may have a conflict to be on these boards. I will tell you that they may be good and just and kind people, but that conflict is enough to upset the whole apple cart if the perception is that there's bias that's been placed into the system.

I think that's sometimes where we hurt ourselves, either intentionally or unintentionally, when we allow these things to happen. We have the ability to correct that during the amendments. I hope the government will listen to that because this isn't just about, you know, one section of our economy. This is about all of Alberta.

There's another piece in there that I thought was kind of strange. Many boards, many government agencies indemnify the members, the employees from a number of different actions and protections but never for criminal. If you commit a crime and you are a criminal, then usually that's where you get cut loose, and you suffer the criminal justice system. That's what you do. I notice that in this act there is an indemnification clause for also criminal action. I don't know why they put that in, and hopefully the minister can explain that. I don't see where we need to protect somebody from criminal action. In other words, if they commit a criminal action and it's proven to be such, then let them suffer the criminal justice system. That's why we have it. With everything else the indemnification seems to make sense to me, but that one just jumped off the page, and I'm not sure why.

With those two provisions, the whole conflict of interest and then the "If you commit a crime, we can indemnify you," I'm not sure how that actually works, to be perfectly honest. I scratched my head on that. We have a Justice minister, who may want to comment on how that would happen. How do you indemnify somebody from criminal activity? I don't think it overrules the criminal justice codes, but someone more qualified than me can

answer that question. But I don't think we even want to attempt that. That's what's not logical to me. There are many parts of this bill that I think we could clean up – and those are two areas that are significant – to give some integrity and credibility to the whole process.

Again, I would like to support the bill. I won't call it junk. That's not appropriate, and I don't plan on it. But I will tell you this. It's hollow. It doesn't do anything that we can't do now. It doesn't add any protection. I don't see where it brings any more confidence to the system at all. It's interesting that industry . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak in favour of Bill 31, Protecting Alberta's Environment Act. Bill 31 will establish the Alberta environmental monitoring, evaluation, and reporting agency, the first of its kind in Canada. This legislation is a vital component in this government's commitment to environmental stewardship. It is one of many initiatives and programs our government has put in place to show the world that we are balancing our economic interests with responsible resource development and ensuring that our environment is front and centre.

Last year the government implemented the lower Athabasca regional plan, the first regional plan in Alberta, a regional plan, by the way, which has caught the attention of many countries around the world. They are interested in what we're doing and are actively seeking more information about the regional planning process.

Through regional planning Alberta is moving to a more efficient and effective management system, a system that considers the cumulative effects of all activities. Our government is committed to managing the cumulative effects of development on air, water, land, and biodiversity. This allows us to understand the effects of multiple development pressures, assess risk, and work in a collaborative manner to improve the integration of economic, environmental, and social considerations.

Regional plans adopt the cumulative effects approach, managing the impacts of existing and new activities. It is based on our understating of environmental risks and socioeconomic values and provides valuable insight in setting environmental objectives and then managing those objectives. The new monitoring agency is a cornerstone of those considerations.

Bill 31 is enabling legislation that sets out AEMERA's purpose, identifies key activities it will undertake, and describes its powers. It establishes AEMERA as a provincial corporation governed by a board of directors, operated by a CEO, and accountable to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. As an arm's-length agency, AEMERA brings its independence into being by determining the scientific basis for monitoring and reporting the results of the monitoring. It is the science and reporting that is independent. A science advisory panel, comprised of internationally recognized environmental scientists, will ensure AEMERA's work is based on scientifically sound practices. This group of experts will make recommendations to government on how to best design independent, effective, and scientific oversight of the enhanced monitoring program.

9:50

Independent oversight for monitoring was one of the recommendations put forward in the provincial monitoring panel's

report from 2011. Alberta has always stood behind this recommendation with one hundred per cent commitment. By seeking advice from some of the world's best and brightest, we will find workable and achievable options to build an independent oversight process that is designed to succeed and built to last. We will use the findings as a springboard for further progress on cutting-edge environmental monitoring across the province.

The work of this agency will begin in the oil sands region and eventually will spread to become a province-wide monitoring agency. Once created, the agency will assume duties for the joint Canada-Alberta monitoring program. It will work closely with officials from Environment and Sustainable Resource Development and our partners at the federal level to ensure the success of the joint monitoring program.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 31 is a major piece of environmental legislation. It shows that Alberta and Canada are taking the environmental responsibilities seriously. Establishment of a world-class, independent, science-based monitoring agency demonstrates that commitment. As we continue to build Alberta, initiatives such as this are vital to securing market access to our products and showing the world that we are leading the way. As we move into debate on this bill, I encourage its support. This is important legislation for all Albertans and demonstrates our hard work toward meeting our goals.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Minister. I'm sure your colleague is grateful for your support. I have a couple of questions for you. You referenced cumulative effects a number of times. Has the department been able to settle on a definition of cumulative effects that can be used to measure what you're actually looking for?

A second question. It appears that the government is trying to set up a business model for this agency, especially when it's endowing it with borrowing powers, ability to buy real property, and it starts out with a CEO. I just would like confirmation that this actually will be a public, not-for-profit agency and not some sort of private company.

Finally, if he could explain why there are noneligibility clauses in who is eligible for appointment. Why, in particular, are people that have had the status of bankruptcy ineligible for the board as well as anyone who has been convicted of an indictable offence? Those aren't common clauses in set-ups for NGOs or government agencies, and I'm particularly interested in why you are excluding anyone who's had a bankruptcy proceeding.

Thank you.

Mr. Scott: Thank you for the questions, and we will address those questions during Committee of the Whole.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that answer may be a long time coming.

To the hon. minister, thank you for getting up, particularly since the responsibility is for transparency and accountability. Since the government's decision to exclude a think tank from the processes dealing with the oil sands is what Justice Marceau called "direct apprehension of bias" – and he used some fairly scathing language in his decision – where in the bill, hon. minister, is there any

section or words that will prevent that from happening or assure industry or our customers internationally that we will be open and transparent?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we'll address those issues during Committee of the Whole.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest to make some opening comments on Bill 31, Protecting Alberta's Environment Act. You know, looking at the intention of this bill as described by the minister – to establish a new agency, to make this evaluation and reporting available to the public in an open manner, with scientific data and so forth – really there is very little to criticize in those intentions. Certainly, these are intentions that have been very clearly laid out by individual citizens, by the energy industry here in Alberta and internationally, by interest groups, by opposition parties for many, many years. Those words certainly are something that we all aspire to.

However, Mr. Speaker, as well there are certain undermining elements to this act in the way in which this agency would be set up that make it less than ideal and that, I would suggest, in fact undermine those very principles that are described in the summary and as were described by the minister when she introduced this bill.

It's always very difficult to just ascribe certain objectives and ideals if you do not support those ideals with a framework that will allow this new agency to actually monitor the environment and to report independently and to have that capacity and that independence enshrined in legislation. That, I think, is the short version of the heart of the problem with this bill.

Certainly, it's not unsalvageable. I've already heard from a number of speakers here this evening that they're looking to make amendments that would perhaps satisfy the independence of this monitoring agency. I would suggest that we will be working on a similar amendment, too. If I could just describe in very broad terms what's missing here and what I think becomes obvious to people that will listen to this debate – and many, many thousands and millions of people have some vested interest in this debate and the proper construction of this legislation – what is missing and essential to making an independent environmental agency work is independence, that very word “independence,” and not having it reporting through the ministry as a regular body but reporting as an independent body.

That independence, if we can reach back to the essence of how our judicial system works, is the same sort of thing. You wouldn't think of interfering in a court and its proceedings and its dispensing of law, so I think we could use that same model to create an environmental monitoring agency here in the province of Alberta. We would reach that similar standard of integrity that our judicial system enjoys with its independence here, both in the province of Alberta and in Canada in general, and in other countries around the world.

I guess that that, as a short version, is what I would see as being the solution to Bill 31. As it stands, as it is functioning through the ministry, there is just a basic problem of credibility that will undermine the effectiveness of this agency. We need scientifically sound, independent data about our environment to make correct decisions as we balance resource production with our long-term

health and the long-term sustainability of our energy industry. We need that credibility to export our energy products throughout North America and throughout the world.

We create some constructions that might be able to convince us here in Alberta about the environmental soundness of our energy policy, but if that doesn't wash and if it's not credible or it's not believed internationally, then we're really undermining the very industry, the golden goose, so to speak, that drives our economy. We're not fooling anybody, really, but ourselves in the end. The integrity of this environmental agency is absolutely paramount to make it function, and I think we have the potential to do that by amending and strengthening the independence of this agency in this bill.

We do take major issue with this government's suggestion that the way to do it is as it stands on the page, right? As we've seen with this government's recent handling, say as a parallel situation, with Alberta Health Services, if we're not forced to absolutely maintain independence, we have a tendency to end up with the wrong people at the job, and things just turn out worse than we originally had intended.

10:00

This bill, as I say, provides all the authority to the minister to appoint board members, and none of the guidelines are necessary to make sure that these people reflect the interests of all Albertans but rather how the ministry wants to make those choices.

[Ms Calahasen in the chair]

And so, Mr. – Madam Speaker. Nice to see you there, very nice.

There are so many examples that I can give through the history. I only have to go back as far as the PC appointment of Bruce Carson – right? – made to review this very topic, and then he had to resign for lobbying which was going against the position that he was appointed to.

I mean, this is just one example, right? It's not just simply that government-appointed boards get to run the show, but they also get to appoint the people that would review these boards, too. So, I mean, this just creates a miasma of confusion, I think. Just imagine trying to . . .

Ms Blakeman: That's nice: miasma. That's very nice.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you.

Imagine getting to pick the person that does your evaluation. That's the correlation that I see, right? So, of course, the result is predetermined, somewhat like the Azerbaijani elections. Inadvertently the results were leaked the day before the actual election took place. Similarly, these evaluations that we would do with this board can be prewritten and predetermined very easily through this flawed process.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let's maybe give the benefit of the doubt, that you do pick people, that they do have the right board picked with the right people at this time.

I would like to put forward other questions here, Mr. Speaker. For example, where is the commitment to properly fund this agency? As an independent board you need to use public money to ensure that the results and the choices are not tainted by funding from anywhere but the public interest.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there's an ability for industry contribution in the lower Athabasca region in terms of the monitoring, but I'm confused and need to have clarification on what happens when we go beyond that area.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if this board goes to the minister and says that we need more money to do our job, what would their response be? What provisions do we have specifically in place to ensure that the funding is adequate and that they have the capacity to do the job that they are responsible for?

Also, why are we not entering into a debate on this legislation, then, with a clear picture of what the funding model will be? It undermines any good words and thoughts that we might put forward here in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, if we are debating something that is not going to have the teeth and the capacity to actually carry out a very expensive and sometimes complex job. If we are just painting a lovely picture with words but actually not giving it substance and teeth, then that is not helpful.

The legislation talks about cost recovery, as far as I can see, here in this bill. I'm just wondering how they might be going about that, if this government is considering a tax of some sort, a carbon tax, as reports leading up to this bill have recommended, if there are other ways by which we can have cost recovery. I'm just curious to know where this is going.

I think these are answers that should be in place a long time before this bill actually makes it to this stage, where we are debating it in the House. Otherwise, it's very thin on the ground and, I would suggest, not entirely well crafted.

Even then, I think the minister seems to want to have control of how often this agency gets to report to the public, so when they talk about raw data and public access, there's no guarantee it comes out that way in the wash. Again, this whole idea of the ministry controlling the data: even if it's not being changed and/or edited or limited, then you still have the public perception that it could have been or might be in the future, and that undermines the credibility of this agency.

I think, Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity here to be real leaders in environmental monitoring. But I think what appears to be happening here – and, please, I would love to be proven wrong on this. I really do expect and know that this is the time and place where if we put in a proper environmental agency and give it true independence, we will take a giant leap forward in being able to create a sustainable and reasonable agency to give credibility to our energy industry. But if it's just another political ploy, if it doesn't have the substance that I've just discussed here in a framework, then certainly I'm not prepared to support any version of this, with amendments or not.

I guess we've learned already from what we've heard from the briefing of the bill that the intention of this bill is to end quibbling and debate about data. This is certainly how this agency will be used in the future. They approve a board who then appoints and reviews scientists. Any arm's-length or independent argument has to be attacked at this point. It's clearly an attempt to have control, then, of what the data and the endgame will actually be regarding the environment. We've seen problems with this already. We've seen a very cavalier approach to who gets to even present at environmental hearings recently. You know, that doesn't bode well for how this agency might be structured and/or controlled in the future.

Overwhelming concerns in looking at this bill should be, I think, Mr. Speaker, whether the independence is anything close to that and how selective the release of data will actually be. People will be watching this very closely, and I certainly will expect that not just Albertans but Canadians and internationally will, I think, judge us not on the words of this bill but the actions that will accompany it, as they should. Certainly, no one knows better than all of us here in this Legislature what is at stake in regard to the integrity and the ability for us to market our energy products around the world. We travel the world to advocate for selling our energy products. I think we need to get the most value from those energy products. I think

we certainly need to be processing them through various secondary industries. But we will be hampered at every stage along the way, from investment to marketing to that final sale, if we're not providing an honest and sincere environmental framework with an independent environmental monitoring agency that can give the real data and the truth about the state of our environment here in Alberta and the state of our various emissions.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate on this.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has moved to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:10 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

Bill 207 Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 207 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I must say that I appreciate the alacrity with which the House dealt with that matter, and I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 207.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 207. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Does the House concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 207 Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013

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

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to stand today in support of Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, presented by the Member for Calgary-Foothills. Unfortunately, there are few positive numbers and statistics to work with, only that Alberta has the dubious distinction of being the lowest rated participant in Canada for donating organs. Past governments have failed organ donors and organ recipients by not placing a higher importance on this issue as a whole, and those are losses that can never be recovered, no matter the money or efforts thrown at it now.

This registration process needs to make registering to donate your organs as simple as possible should something detrimental happen to an individual. The last thing anyone needs in a time of crisis, of family loss, or in a time where quick decision-making is required is a process that is cumbersome and prolonged and that adds more anguish to an already difficult situation. The will of the organ donor needs to be easily identified and respected so that should there be an opportunity to save a life or multiple lives through the loss of another person's life, this wish is followed through.

Out of all the bills presented and tabled to date since this session began, this is a bill that has no political agenda, so I encourage all members from all parties to support this bill and make sure that it is passed and enacted so that it actually does benefit people in need as soon as possible. Just think about how many people might have been given an extra lease on life had this bill been enacted at any point in the past. The numbers would be staggering, I'm sure. Imagine how many people might still be here today, maybe even somebody sitting in this Legislature who was fortunate to receive a donated organ to allow them to continue living.

A constituent of mine, JoAnn Olson, lost her son, Wade Strong. Wade passed away on July 28 while waiting for a liver transplant. She would really appreciate it if everyone could support Bill 207. Even more poignant is that today would have been Wade's 40th birthday.

When the regulations are being developed for Bill 207, I do hope that those doing this will also review how people are screened for organs and that the requirements put on them are not onerous. For the individual above there was an unnecessary requirement to attend a course, and I ask for your approval to share with you an excerpt from the letter that he shared with our office. I can't confirm any of the information provided, but when a person is facing a life-or-death situation, I'm sure they have probably exhausted any and all options available to them and simply want a chance at life without needless rules and regulations that make the opportunity much more difficult.

Unfortunately, I never did have the chance to meet Wade Strong. He sent this e-mail to our office on July 24, 2013, and as mentioned, he passed away July 28, 2013, four days later.

Hello, All,

I live on a farm . . . in the county of Rocky View . . . I am desperate for any help that can be given, as I have only seen a specialist 2 times for a total of 30 mins in 8 mths since they told me I have 2 years to live. I am getting sicker and have paid all my own expenses to try and get myself the best possible shot. I have passed all other health testing and I did finish 1 AADAC course and during the second one I was half finished and was hospitalized and almost died from a stomach infection. I am willing to do anything to finish whatever course is needed but I have to be in the Foothills [hospital] every Thursday to drain excess fluids. They didn't even give me credit for the first half of the course. Today I was told and not in a nice way . . ."

The Deputy Speaker: If I may, my apologies, but procedurally we didn't have the sponsor of the bill move third reading. We should have that done, and then I'll allow you to continue immediately after. If you'll just rest for a moment, I'll recognize the member for Calgary-Foothills to move third reading of Bill 207.

Mr. Webber: All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to stand here today in third reading of Bill 207, Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, we are all now very well aware that Alberta does lag behind other provinces in donation rates for organs and tissues. Bill 207 will take action to improve Alberta's rates. It's not just about organs and tissues. It's about creating hope, hope for Albertans. The actions in the bill will give hope to families, especially those on waiting lists. Bill 207 takes aggressive action to increase donation rates in Alberta. It will mean that more people will receive the life-changing transplant that they need, and it will improve many other Albertans' healthy way of life. But ultimately it's about saving lives.

I thank the hundreds of Albertans who have expressed their support for this bill, who have written to me, called me, e-mailed me, and I thank all those in the transplant community who have helped me with this initiative, the many that are so passionate about improving our organ and donation system here in Alberta. I especially want to thank each and every one of you in this Assembly who have supported me on this front and who have supported this unanimously. I will stop there and just say thank you, all, and God bless you all.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: And move third reading, hon. member.

Mr. Webber: Oh. Okay. I'd like to move third reading.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that we have a couple of other people that would like to speak on this, though.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Medicine Hat to finish from where he left off.

10:20

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for jumping the gun there. If you would indulge me I'd like to start back on the letter, if that's all right.

Unfortunately, I never had the chance to meet Wade Strong. He sent this e-mail to our office on July 24, 2013, and as mentioned, he passed away on July 28, 2013.

Hello, All,

I live on a farm . . . in the county of Rocky View . . . I am desperate for any help that can be given, as I have only seen a specialist 2 times for a total of 30 mins in 8 mths since they told me I have 2 years to live. I am getting sicker and have paid all my own expenses to try and get myself the best possible shot. I have passed all other health testing and I did finish 1 AADAC course and during the second one I was half finished and was hospitalized and almost died from a stomach infection. I am willing to do anything to finish whatever course is needed but I have to be in the Foothills [hospital] every Thursday to drain excess fluids. They didn't even give me credit for the first half of the course. Today I was told and not in a nice way from [a government bureaucrat] to take the full course or die. And on top of this they hadn't even booked me into Edmonton to get on the list which I now find out is 4 more mths of waiting. I am shocked with AHS. The care and mistakes that have been made make Sudan look like a better place to have this happen.

Anyway look forward to moving forward as myself and my family would like to see me turn 40. A liver transplant in a foreign country is about [\$100,000 to \$300,000] in the States and I figure AHS has spent 1Million [dollars] on me, and we have accomplished nothing while I have gotten sicker.

Thank you.

Wade Strong.

I hope everyone listened closely to this plea for help, this plea for compassion and understanding, this plea to simply be given a chance at life. Let's all make sure the intent of Bill 207 is followed through when the regulations are developed. What we all don't need is another bill that had great intentions that was changed, watered down, or regulated into ineffective or inefficient legislation. Let's make sure the process is effective and efficient and that energy resources being expended get concentrated on the service and not the service provider.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, if there is anything we can do today to give people like Wade a second chance at life, then we must do it.

God bless you, Wade Strong. God bless you, JoAnn Olson, in the loss of your son.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't imagine who wouldn't be supportive of this bill, and I'm going to give credit for repeated tries. I think there have been three attempts to create a successful and positive organ donation program in Alberta. There are times when I am greatly annoyed by government's persistence in trying to do stupid legislation, but I have to commend them for their perseverance in bringing this forward repeatedly and trying to get people on board with it.

I do support the legislation. I know that my whole caucus did. The educational piece always seems like a bit of an add-on, but I was listening to the radio the other day, and a doctor was describing how he was working with the family and the time had come to say, "You need to think about organ donation," and the family said, "Yes, yes." The doctor reiterated that the person had a living will and had indicated that it was on their card. They'd indicated it. Then when they came back with the forms for the family to sign, they went: "Oh, no, no. We can't sign that." So it is always a matter of both as much incentive and encouragement and rules that we can put in place to try and get people to think about this and to take a positive step, but it is also the follow-up with the

families because it does all go off the rails if in the very end they won't give permission on the spot.

So my commendation to the government for pursuing this and to the member, in particular, for pursuing it. This is a very positive step, and I'm very pleased to see the government taking it.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, sorry. My apologies. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available after that last speech.

Seeing none, then I will recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to congratulate and thank the hon. member. I've heard a lot about the history of this, and quite honestly I've learned a lot about organ transplant. I was quite impressed with the number of letters that I got on this bill and the amount of concern that I think citizens had right across all of Alberta. It is always a pleasure when we can be part of something where we actually do good, where we actually can see how we affect the quality of life and can improve it for others.

I'm proud to be part of this moment, and I want to congratulate you for allowing me to be part of that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Are there others?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: That motion is carried unanimously. [applause]

I'll recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good day to be alive. I think on that very positive note it would be a very good time for us to go home and reflect on the work that's happened today and come back tomorrow to do more good work for the people of Alberta. So I'd move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 27	Flood Recovery and Reconstruction Act	2549
Bill 28	Modernizing Regional Governance Act	2550
Bill 29	Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2013	2550, 2554
Bill 31	Protecting Alberta's Environment Act	2560

Committee of the Whole

Bill 207	Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013	2566
----------	---	------

Third Reading

Bill 207	Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013	2566
----------	---	------

Introduction of Guests	2553
------------------------------	------

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Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
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9718 – 107 St.
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