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The 28th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 4, 2013

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

Let us pray. Dear Lord and Great Creator, we ask that You provide us with strength and determination but also with compassion and understanding as we carry out our duties to serve all Albertans and those who visit us in this great province that we so proudly call our home. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of *O Canada* in our Assembly, led today, as it was last week, by one of our LAO staff, Colleen Vogel. Thank you so much.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Colleen.

Thank you, hon. members. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and leader of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Rick Miller's family: his wife, Lois Jonsson-Miller; his two children Chris and Kim Miller; his daughter-in-law Jordyn Miller; and his grandson, Gracin Miller.

Rick was an important member of our Liberal family, serving as party president, our caucus chief of staff, and MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Rick was well known as a generous Rotarian, a friend to many, and an avid lover of Alberta's outdoors as he soared with the eagles in his hang-glider. Rick was much more than that to his family. He was a devoted son, husband, loving father, brother, uncle, and caring grandfather to Gracin.

Almost a year ago I introduced Rick in this Assembly as he openly championed the fight against prostate cancer. On the past Friday Rick joined his daughter Nicole in heaven.

A public celebration of Rick's life will be held on November 15 at the Delta Edmonton South, and his family would like all of us to attend.

On behalf of the Alberta Liberal family and the Alberta Legislature family I would like to thank his family for sharing Rick with us. He was a gift to us all. I would ask his family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, allow me to also extend a sincere welcome to Lois and her family. Thank you so much for coming today so that we could pay a second and additional tribute to a wonderful human being who graced this Assembly and worked

hard for Albertans just a few short years ago. Please know that this is an additional tribute to the official one, that we did last Monday, when we held a moment of silence in his honour and the flags on our building were lowered to half-mast in his honour. May God be with you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, your first introduction.

Ms Fenske: Thank you Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Gary Stead, who is seated in your gallery. He is a councillor for the village of Chipman, a position he has held now for 28 and a half years. He has just been re-elected to that position. If you would please join with me – I'll ask Gary to rise – and give him the traditional warm greeting of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us proceed with school groups, beginning with your second introduction, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you members of the Fort Saskatchewan Homeschool Group, who are seated in the members' general gallery. They have been with us here today to tour the Legislature, and I would ask that the Assembly give them the warm greeting of this Assembly, please.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, a mere four blocks from my childhood home is St. James Catholic elementary school, and they're here today to join with us and receive greetings of the Assembly. Mrs. Kristie Falk, their teacher, is a notable teacher, and they're accompanied by Ms Evans and Mrs. Said. Please, if we could acknowledge St. James today and give them the warm reception of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Then let us proceed with other guests, beginning with the Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Lindsay Bowthorpe and Michael Arget, future physicians and medical leaders in our province. Lindsay and Michael both chair the political advocacy committee for their respective medical school associations at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary.

For the past five years U of A and U of C medical students have come to the Legislature to meet with MLAs to discuss issues of importance to them and to their future. This year's topic of discussion, chosen by the students, is the prevention of youth smoking and the use of flavoured tobacco. Mr. Speaker, I met with all 50 of these medical students this morning. I can report to the House that our health care system is in very good hands with their leadership in the future.

I now ask that Ms Bowthorpe and Mr. Arget and their colleagues as well rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the

Assembly a group of inspiring women whom we are honoured to have hosted in a working session this morning on the establishment of a First Nations women's council on economic security. Some of these outstanding women were not able to stay today, but to those that are here, please rise when I say your name so you can be recognized: Angela Grier, councillor of Piikani Nation; Barb Wendt, councillor of Beaver Nation; Koren Lightning-Earle, councillor of the Samson Cree Nation; Andrea Pritchard Kennedy with Mount Royal College; Anna Wowchuk, Women Building Futures; Brenda Joly, director of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations; Effie Anderson with Kapawe'no First Nation; Grace Auger with Eagle Law; Margo Pariseau with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women; and Nicole Bouchier, a consultant with the Bouchier Group. Joining them is Tracy Balash, who works in my office as an ADM and is the aboriginal women's initiative and research lead on this.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who has taken a lead in establishing this council and who is working with Aboriginal Relations and these women on this very important issue. I'd ask that they please receive the customary warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly eight representatives from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter, here today in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Canada's first place of Muslim prayer, the Al-Rashid mosque. This historic building is now located in Fort Edmonton Park and continues to play a vital role in the prayer and community life of Edmonton's Muslim community.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise as I mention their names. We have this afternoon Ms Soraya Zaki Hafez, president, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Dr. Zohra Husaini, project director, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Mrs. Maria Syed, treasurer, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Ms Sahar Deeb, project director, Canadian Islamic Centre, and member of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Mrs. Nasim Kherani, member, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Ms Sara Javed, member, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; Ms Fatiyeh Hazimeh Muwais, member, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter; and Ms Yasmeen Nizam, member, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter. I would now ask that the Assembly provide them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, my other guest is not here.

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of hard-working, committed people representing the Arbour Lake Community Association and the Arbour Lake Residents Association.

Later, in my member's statement, you will hear me talking about the Arbour Lake community being recognized as the best

neighbourhood in Calgary through *Avenue* magazine. Mr. Speaker, I want to attribute a large part of that achievement to the leadership and the dedication of service from those people that made it happen.

Before I introduce my guests, I would ask that when I mention their name, they please stand to be recognized. They are sitting in the public gallery: Mrs. Marianne Hollingsworth, president of the community association; Mr. Ken Jones, board member of the residents' association; Cassandra Lehti and Carlo Villarreal, who are staff members of the residents' association; and Mr. Craig Somers. Let me share a few lines about Craig. During my campaign trail I heard so many stories about this guy named Craig and how he transformed the community as a volunteer board member and the GM. The first time I met with him, for sure that passion showed through. Thank you. The last one is my fabulous assistant, Maria Somers. I would like to ask my colleagues here to give them the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. McDonald: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you the director of district 4, the northern region of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Mr. Tom Burton. Elected to the MD of Greenview council in 2001, Tom has served on a variety of boards and committees. Tom is also a registered emergency medical responder and is a very active volunteer in his community. I'd ask that Tom rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I understand your guests are not here yet, so let us proceed.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Al-Rashid Mosque

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to help commemorate the 75th anniversary of Canada's first mosque, the Al-Rashid mosque.

Since the beginning of the 20th century the first Muslim pioneers who migrated to the Canadian prairies and to Edmonton came from Syria and Lebanon. As they became contributing citizens to life in Alberta and Edmonton as fur traders, ranchers, and shopkeepers, they began to think about a place for congregational prayer, and the idea of building a permanent mosque came into focus. While the founding pioneers list both men and women, it was Muslim women who catalyzed the fundraising effort to build the Al-Rashid mosque.

Through the leadership of Hilwi Hamdon, the prairie Muslim women of Edmonton met with Mayor John W. Fry with the hope of securing land in the city's north area to build the mosque. The scale of their ambition and of all the founding families was immense. Their efforts resulted in the official opening of the Al-Rashid mosque on December 12, 1938, at 102nd Street and 108th Avenue in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I am mindful of the hardships borne by these courageous women and others as this endeavour was embarked upon during a time known as the Great Depression. We are very fortunate that in 1992 the Al-Rashid mosque became an historical site and was relocated to Fort Edmonton Park.

On September 19, 2013, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter, and yours truly along with many

others celebrated the steadfast efforts and persevering spirit of the founding pioneers and the long-standing success of the Al-Rashid mosque.

Congratulations to the enormous leadership of all those involved in the Muslim community and, in particular, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Edmonton chapter. The Al-Rashid mosque's place in the history of our city, province, and great country is immeasurable.

Praise to God as the Al-Rashid mosque is remembered for shaping the future of Muslim cultural importance, sacred traditions, and spiritual meaning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Betty Anne Gagnon

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, today I would like the Assembly to reflect on the life of Betty Anne Gagnon. Many of you will be familiar with Betty Anne's story as her caregivers were sentenced to 20 months in jail on Friday for failing to provide the necessities of life.

This tragic tale begins in 2005, when PDD placement in a group home ended and a new placement had to be found for her. Authorities decided to place Betty Anne under the care of her sister and her husband. The caregivers hoped they could get some support from PDD, but their applications for programming and transportation for Betty Anne were denied in 2007, so they received nothing other than her monthly AISH benefit. The caregivers looked for help again in 2009, around the same time that their lives became entangled with employment, mental health, and drug problems. Her sister indicated in February of that year she could no longer cope and requested a new placement. PDD advised her she would have to wait for up to a year.

A placement was found in July 2009, but due to a bureaucratic error the caregivers never received the notice. It seems the unfortunate events that followed could have been prevented had PDD done its due diligence and ensured the caregivers were made aware of the placement opportunity. Instead, they closed her file.

As the situation deteriorated, the caregivers put Betty Anne in a makeshift jail cell in the garage, which had nails pointing inward and upward to discourage her from getting out, a toilet with Kitty Litter, and a tether cuff strap that was affixed to the wall. She was often placed in a fenced dog run or locked in the basement. In November of that year Betty Anne was locked in an unheated bus with no running water or toilet 24/7. Betty Anne died on November 20, 2009, at the age of 48. She was five foot two and weighed a mere 65 pounds at the time of her death.

The tragic story of Betty Anne is a wake-up call for the provincial government and all Albertans. Betty Anne's mistreatment and abuse could have been prevented by responding to the repeated pleas for help. I implore this government to take concrete steps to ensure that Betty Anne's horrendous torture and death mean something. Fix this system in her name, and ensure a tragedy of this magnitude never happens again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Chipman Centennial

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The village of Chipman is located in the geographical centre of the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, the constituency I am proud to represent. This year Chipman celebrated its 100th anniversary. Settlers came

to the area in 1892. In 1905 the Canadian Northern Railway arrived, and a townsite was surveyed. Then in 1913 Chipman became the best little village in Alberta, named after Clarence Campbell Chipman, secretary to Sir Charles Tupper, commissioner of the railway.

Chipman's history is marked with several significant and tragic events. In World War I a local reserve unit, the 19th Alberta Dragoons, saw five local boys die in action. In 1931 a disastrous fire destroyed an entire commercial block on Main Street. In 1960 17 young people from Chipman lost their lives on their way to school in the Lamont school bus-train tragedy.

Despite these tragic events the existence of Chipman today is what it is. We had a celebration this summer, and it's a testament to the community and its leaders. The centennial committee, led by Mayor Jim Palmer, Toni Nygren, and Pat Tomkow, brought over 1,500 people to this small village. A car show featuring a vehicle from every year for almost the past 100 years, a tent covering the entire block of Main Street, the Chipman Players, the agricultural society, the Lions Club, the historical society, and even the Emeralds, local men who originally came from Chipman, all ensured we had a weekend to remember. The MLA for Edmonton-Decore and I were pleased and felt very privileged to be included in a celebration of a community that honoured the past and lives the present. If you haven't yet been to Coyote Country, it's time to go.

It's celebrations like these that make me proud as an Albertan. Happy 100th birthday, Chipman.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Minister of Municipal Affairs

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, on October 9 the Minister of Municipal Affairs was at a speaking engagement in Prince Edward Island. He said something there that we find pretty astonishing. He told his audience that Alberta's energy sector, quote, sucks the life out of every other aspect of Alberta, unquote. Now, as the Premier knows, we've always supported her initiatives to promote Alberta's energy sector, but it appears that one of her ministers doesn't. Does the Premier think it is acceptable for this minister to leave the province and be out there trashing our most important industry?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the fact that this government for 41 years has done everything it can to support energy in this province and that it continues to do that. We work very hard to ensure that that happens, and I'll ensure that as we move forward, we continue to do that because, of course, we are our best ambassadors. I'm just going to speculate that there might perhaps be another side to this story, which may very well be something that the Leader of the Official Opposition might want to take into account, ensuring she has all of the information before she asks the question. I'm sure that the minister will provide us with that perspective.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, we're making the video available so that everyone can see the context. We think it is simply appalling that one of the Premier's most trusted ministers would so openly attack our energy sector by saying that it sucks the life out of every other aspect of Alberta when he thought the cameras weren't rolling. Given the Premier's attempts to sell her national energy strategy,

does she feel that the minister's comments help or hinder her efforts?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I was fully aware that the cameras were rolling. That's why I made the comments that I did. The discussion was about what you do in a hot economy, not just what you do when your economy is faltering. I was very cautious in saying that having success has challenges, too, because it can draw energy out of other sectors of the economy and other parts of the province. When there is success, it could have its challenges just as well as if there isn't. It is on live video. I challenge anyone to go watch it and identify what the actual comments are, not what the misquotes are.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, while on the east coast the minister could have used the opportunity to promote the Energy East pipeline, a vital project for Alberta's economy. Instead, he took the opportunity to attack the very sector that he should have been standing up for on his trip. To the Premier: why was the minister out there saying that the energy sector sucks the life out of every other aspect of Alberta instead of promoting the very many national benefits of the Energy East pipeline?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know perfectly well that on this side of the House we understand the importance of a Canadian energy strategy, we understand the importance of our industry, and we also understand that it's important for us to put in place frank, honest discussions about how we build communities across this province to ensure that energy and communities can survive in partnership. That is what this minister does. In fact, that is one of the reasons that we now have the opportunity to work with municipalities on Bill 28, to make sure that continues to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. leader for her second main question.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, still on that subject, the Minister of Municipal Affairs told the audience that the energy industry sucks the life out of every aspect of Alberta while standing in front of a huge blow-up picture of his book. Indeed, the reason he was in P.E.I. was to promote his book. Not only was the minister trashing us to an eastern Canadian audience; he was also doing so in an attempt to increase his book sales. Can the Premier assure Albertans that no taxpayer dollars were spent on getting this minister to and from his promotional speaking gig?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, there isn't a day that goes by where they don't try and smear somebody's reputation. The fact is that I was invited by the Georgetown Conference because of the book that I'd written. It was entirely paid for by them or by myself, the expenses. Nothing was incurred by this province. It was entirely done to talk to and promote the idea about regional collaboration and rural communities and how to fire them up. I will never as long as it's my own personal time pass up an opportunity to help ensure other communities are successful across this country.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last week this minister told the Assembly: everywhere I go, cameras show up. Well, he certainly got that right. As this minister surely knows, it is against the rules for any MLA to use his position to further his own private interests. This government may not recognize the term, but it's called a conflict of interest. Is the Premier comfortable that one of her ministers is out there moonlighting on the private speaking circuit with the likes of Justin Trudeau?

Mr. Griffiths: Another day, another smear, Mr. Speaker. I had discussed this issue with the Ethics Commissioner. I received absolutely no personal profit from this whatsoever. Simply, the expenses were paid by the Georgetown Conference so that I could come and talk about the book. In fact, I insisted that there be no mention of any politics involved whatsoever. It was simply my perspective on rural development and community building, which is what I was there to speak about.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the minister's behaviour over the last few weeks has been, well, to shorten one of his more colourful phrases, embarrassing. Not only is he burning bridges with municipalities; he's now burning bridges on the Premier's file. With his insulting attacks on our most important industry, this minister is undermining all of her work at expanding markets for our energy products. To the Premier: will she do us all a favour and just let this minister focus full-time on selling his book rather than selling out Albertans?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my first comments, I'm not going to stand in this House and listen to that Leader of the Opposition characterize this hon. minister, who is doing work to build community not only in Alberta but across the country, and I'm not going to take this hon. member's word for her characterization or quote as to what the minister did or did not say. As I understood the minister's response, he said that he was quite proud of the fact that the video is there, that if anything was actually looked at in context, it would tell a very different story. I would suggest that the hon. leader consider that before she carries on with this.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. Your third and final main set of questions.

Whistle-blower Protection for Health Professionals

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should also have been embarrassed by the performance of her Minister of Accountability, Transparency and Transformation last Thursday. He was asked a very simple question about including doctors under our whistle-blower act. Now, I'm not a lawyer, but the Premier is, and so is Justice Vertes. Come to think of it, so is this minister. Justice Vertes stated quite clearly in his report that we need to change the law to protect doctors. The minister seems oblivious to that. Will the Premier instruct her minister to bring in the changes that Justice Vertes recommended and actually protect doctors in Alberta?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows or should know, the current legislation, that was passed under the leadership of my colleague, does protect doctors who are in a contract relationship with Alberta Health Services. Justice Vertes in his report commented on the group of doctors who have no contractual relationship to provide services to Alberta Health Services and are in private practice. In response we said that we would welcome the opportunity to study that and accepted that recommendation in principle. That's what we're doing now.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday the minister said that there are medical professionals that are covered under the whistle-blower legislation except that he must have known that the medical professionals are only protected if they are employees of the government and that most doctors, as the Minister of Health has just reminded us, are not employees of the government and,

therefore, are not protected. To the Premier: does the minister not understand his own legislation, or is he trying to mislead Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what is misleading is this hon. member's contention that somehow health care workers in Alberta are not comprehensively protected by this legislation. This legislation protects workers who work for agencies that contract to Alberta Health Services, organizations like Covenant Health. It protects the vast majority of physicians in this province who do work under a privileging arrangement with a hospital or with another program operated by Alberta Health Services. There is some considerable work to be done in figuring out how to apply this legislation to physicians who have no such formal relationship with the public health system, and that's the work that we're engaged in.

2:00

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this legislation protects the government, not health professionals.

In October of last year the minister gave an interview where he clearly acknowledged that doctors would not be protected from reprisals if they brought forward a complaint against the government. Justice Vertes made fixing this his second recommendation. The government has said that it accepts all of Justice Vertes' recommendations. When will the government introduce legislation to include all health care professionals, including physicians, under the whistle-blower protection act?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm not really surprised that we're only into day 5 of this session and we're already seeing the hon. member stand up and make these false connections that just don't make sense to Albertans. Every single person who works in the health care system in Alberta that has any connection to government or receives any money from the public purse is protected under this legislation. [interjections] Now, that's actually plain language, and that's plain because it applies to doctors, to nurses, and to health care workers. The only people, Mr. Speaker, that are not included are private physicians. The minister has said that we are reviewing this. These are complicated issues, and they will be dealt with.

The Speaker: Please, let's keep the interjections down, or today I will ask whoever is speaking to continue on with their answers if necessary.

Let's go to the leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Government Spending

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my hand I'm holding a FOIP which goes into great detail about fancy new furniture for the office of the minister of advanced education at a cost of more than \$10,000 to taxpayers while this government was inflicting the worst cuts to postsecondary education in decades. I guess that when the minister talks about tough times, he's only talking about tough times for students, families, faculty, and staff, not for himself. To the minister of advanced education: how do you justify pleading poverty to our colleges and universities when there's clearly no lack of funds to refurbish your office?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, we have the honour and pleasure of serving in a building that is now over 100 years old, and as this member knows, furniture in offices gets replaced routinely. I'm sure his constituency offices and others have received new furniture. The fact is that we have staff. The furniture was for staff that work in our office. They work long hours, and they need to

have furniture that is safe and appropriate, much like any constituency office, that many of them have benefited from.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, seriously, probably one of the most troubling e-mails contained in the FOIP said that the minister of advanced education was "having far too much fun" rearranging all his new furniture. This is at the same time that faculty and staff were losing their jobs and students were being told that their programs were being cancelled. To the minister of advanced education: are you not concerned in the least that refurbishing your office with luxury furniture at the same time that you're threatening to audit universities' expenses may be a bit hypocritical?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, I'm glad, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition is keeping their eye on the ball and that they're addressing important Alberta issues. Whoever wrote that obviously has never seen me having fun because rearranging furniture wouldn't be part of that. If he finds that furniture from IKEA is extravagant for government employees in a building that is 100 years old and with furniture that has not been ergonomic, not sufficient for staff to work in, let him say so.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the minister here had to have a cabinet restained to match the other piece of furniture.

Mr. Speaker, during last year's election the Premier told post-secondary students that she had walked in their shoes. Next thing you know she's giving her bitumen sham speech and making the most brutal cutbacks in decades, completely unnecessary given the fact that this government reported a \$722 million surplus in the last fiscal quarterly update. To the Premier: since you say that you've walked in the shoes of our students, how do you think they feel now that you have betrayed them?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the reason that we're the government and they're where they are. Six billion dollars is not a sham. It's the entire education budget for the province of Alberta. It was a serious issue that we had to deal with. It was not the choice that we wanted to make, but we had to make decisions to ensure that we could live within our means and continue to keep systems working. That's exactly what we did. We've had incredible co-operation from postsecondary institutions, and we will consider taking every step we can to ensure that students get excellent access to education.

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

Medical Laboratory Services

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government is running in circles on health care. While the Premier wants to implement her Harper-style conservative agenda, the NDP and health professionals are fighting back. We stood up against the PCs with this half-baked scheme to privatize lab services. This weekend they pulled it off the table. Now, apparently, it's back on as of this afternoon. To the Health minister: why won't you admit that your plan to give \$3 billion to private lab companies with rotten records of defrauding the public purse was a bad idea from the start?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I think the hon. member vastly overestimates his own influence. The fact of the matter is that on this side of the House we are committed to providing state-of-the-art lab services for the residents of Edmonton and northern Alberta for the long term. The comments that were made by the acting chief executive officer of AHS on Friday

reflect a commitment to consultation, as it should be, not in terms of what we are doing but how we are going to do it. We will deliver on the best possible lab services for residents of the northern part of the province. We have a plan to do that. Nothing has changed.

Mr. Eggen: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker, given that this government only bothers to consult after public outrage and given that this same minister just said outside these walls right now that he would go full steam ahead on this privatization scheme and consult at the same time.

Health professionals know that this is a bad idea. Albertans who value public health care know that this is a dangerous idea. What could possibly happen between then and now that could make this corporate giveaway actually resemble a good idea?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans know is that making important decisions about the health care system based on political ideology is not what they want. What they want is for the government to plan for the long term, to plan for the future, to recognize things like the fact that in 2015 existing lab space that is available to us in Edmonton will no longer be available, to recognize the fact that demand is growing by 6 per cent a year, and to put a solid, responsible plan in place with partners as appropriate to deliver the best quality lab services we can. That's what's happening now. That's what will continue to happen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. Either you're going to listen to what front-line professionals think or you're going to steamroll straight on through and listen to no one at all. You can't do both. So why won't this minister stand down and listen to the people who actually deliver lab services and know that your private lab scheme is bound to fail, cost Albertans more money, and hurt patients?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I know is that the vast majority of pathologists in this province, in fact, support the move to a state-of-the-art facility to serve Edmonton and northern Alberta for the future. There are over 90 pathologists that work with Alberta Health Services. Because of the consultation that AHS has done with them, with other employees, and with other partners, we know that there is an orderly approach to the implementation of this initiative. What that member should be concerned with is whether his constituents have access to all of the lab services that should be available to them on a timely basis. That's what we're planning for. He's welcome to get onboard at any time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that completes the first five spots which are allocated for opposition leaders' questions including preambles to supplementary questions, so please curtail your preambles here on forward.

Let's go with Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Betty Anne Gagnon

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to again reflect on the tragic death of Betty Anne Gagnon. Betty Anne died due to the negligence of her caregivers, who were convicted of failing to provide the necessities of life. The sentencing judge characterized the treatment of Betty Anne as callous and cruel and noted that the convicted pair engaged in atrocious activities. The convicted caregivers sought and were repeatedly denied help from this province. To the Minister of Human Services: what is the ministry doing about it?

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

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to agree with that hon. member that the death of Betty Anne Gagnon was indeed tragic, a horrific event. I am not going to comment on the facts of the matter or any reaction to them right now. The court case is still open. You'll know that the appeal period has not expired yet. Following that, there will be a fatality inquiry. I will agree again with the member and say that we will have to respond to make sure that this can never happen again.

2:10

The Speaker: Could we clarify? Is this matter still sub judice, then? Can anybody here? So let's be very careful.

The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the convicted caregivers looked to the province for help on several occasions and their being turned away repeatedly contributed to the horrendous treatment she received, including being tethered inside a cage, can the minister advise the Assembly if the caseworker who managed this file is still an employee of the government of Alberta?

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be careful with your question and the answer on a file that may be sub judice.

I don't know if the Minister of Justice wishes to clarify this matter before we proceed any further. Could you take the floor, hon. minister, for a moment?

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise this House that the judgment did come down last week, but the appeal period has not yet lapsed, and I'm not aware of whether or not the Crown intends to appeal.

The Speaker: All right. The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, to that I would add that as these are matters, of course, before a court, I cannot comment on them and won't.

Mr. Wilson: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the caregivers, again, repeatedly asked for help and when a few phone calls and a letter went unanswered, the case was closed, how is it possible that no one in the PDD system followed up on this file, allowing the tragedy of Betty Anne's death to occur?

The Speaker: You drew a fine line here.

Perhaps the Minister of Human Services can clarify things for us.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the most important thing to say to the House today is that the only thing that would be more tragic than the death of Betty Anne Gagnon is to not learn from it, to not examine deeply what happened, why it happened, and what could have been done about it. I can assure the public of Alberta that that's exactly what has been done and what will be done. There will be a fatality inquiry in which all of that can become part of the public discussion. That can't happen until the appeal period has expired and the fatality inquiry is in place. I can assure the public that we are going to learn and have learned from this tragic situation. The Alberta public can know that we will make sure that every Albertan has the opportunity to be protected and that these sorts of circumstances should not be

happening. Every Albertan should be alert to it, and we will be alert to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

School Construction

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've said it before, but despite this spring's earlier announcements of more schools, my constituency continues to experience unprecedented growth. I stood here last fall asking the Minister of Education, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the President of the Treasury Board, and I'll keep asking till we get our schools. Some quick stats: Johnny Bright public school had to move grades 8 and 9 out last year due to growth; Monsignor Fee Otterson school, which doesn't have a playground yet, is experiencing increasing kindergarten pressures like we've never seen; and Bessie Nichols' enrolment shot through the roof this year and desperately needs portables. To the Minister of Education: when will we as parents start to see the measures in the form of bricks and mortar in the communities where our schools need to be?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I know this member has been a great advocate. He's been quite persistent on this file. Some might say he's so persistent that he'd give a woodpecker a headache. But I welcome that, and I welcome his advocacy for his community. I know that he was pleased when we announced the new K to 6 school in the spring and when we cut the ribbon on the Bessie Nichols school last year. All I can say is that in the next three years we're going to create about 23,000 new spaces for students by investing about \$2 billion in schools. Thanks to this Premier the government is going to keep building Alberta, and these schools will be a part of that.

Mr. Jeneroux: Well, expect a chronic headache, Mr. Minister.

I want to start with a thank you for the new school in the Southbrook community. Unfortunately, it's only one of at least three more needed in Edmonton-South West. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when can we find the resources to add more elementary schools, more junior high schools, and more high schools in Edmonton to keep up with this unprecedented rate of growth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to thank this member for his unwavering commitment to his community. As you know, Alberta is the fastest growing of all provinces in Canada, and this rapid growth causes a number of challenges, not the least of which is the increased demand for school spaces. I can tell you that this government knows how important new schools are to Alberta families and communities. Budget 2013 provides \$503 million over the next three years for 50 new schools.

The Speaker: You had one more supplemental? Proceed with your last one.

Mr. Jeneroux: Right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of Education: given that we don't need to be rocket scientists to know that our K to 9 kids will be off to high school in a few years and given that we don't expect this growth to slow down any time soon, when our children become teenagers, what high school do you expect them to go to?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. These enrolment pressures that they have in southwest Edmonton we've got all over the province. We do have a big bubble coming in in the primary grades, which is going to move on through to high schools, obviously. We are investing in the bricks and mortar, but the other thing we've got to do is make sure we use our assets properly. There are in the neighbourhood of 50,000 empty seats in the Edmonton region right now. So these are challenges. We need to work with the community and the school boards. But I can tell you that we're also changing the way that we deliver high school. In the future, when those kids get to high school, there are going to be things like delinking time from the time they sit in the class to when they get their credits. There's dual crediting going on. There'll be digital diploma exams so kids can learn at any pace, at any place, at any time. All these things are going to factor in to what high school looks like.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Glenmore

Medical Laboratory Services

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are tired of watching this government mismanage our health care system. First, there was the centralization of home-care services, that saw our seniors suffer as the government shook the system upside down. Now the government has been caught dead in its tracks trying to centralize lab services despite pathologists warning that it will result in patients waiting longer for care. Considering this government's record on long wait times for patients, can the Health minister explain why this government bulldozed ahead with this plan before listening to the experts?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was very pleased to state in answer to an earlier question, I consulted with Alberta Health Services today, and I was reassured to know that the overwhelming majority of the 90 pathologists who work in that organization do support state-of-the-art lab services for their constituents. I can only wonder why this hon. member apparently does not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since CEO Duncan Campbell took the time to tweet that they will now be holding consultation with physicians and staff after public backlash, can the Health minister tell us why you didn't listen or consult with the pathologists first?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her information wrong again. Consultations on this initiative have been going on for quite some time, and that is perhaps part of the reason that the opposition raised this matter first when the House reconvened last week. We have absolutely no problem talking about the importance of this initiative, about the fact that it's a plan to ensure that we can keep up with the 6 per cent per year growth in lab tests, about the fact that it's a plan that will make sure that all of the newest and most sophisticated lab tests will be available to residents of the northern part of the province. This is what responsible governments do, and this is how we move forward to a high-performing health care system.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've heard that story before. There has been no consultation on home care. There has been no consultation on EMS dispatch, no consultation on pharmacy, no consultation on front-line care workers, and it goes on and on. Minister, if you've consulted with pathologists, please table it and tell us who you consulted with.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member loves to talk about consultation until the point that the majority of people disagree with her and with her party. The fact of the matter is that I spent the better part of two years as Minister of Health consulting with Albertans about initiatives in all these areas, initiatives that have led to significant improvements in our health care system, that have resulted in some changes to decisions that have kept home-care providers intact for residents of congregate living facilities, in initiatives that will result in state-of-the-art ground ambulance dispatch for every region of this province. There are many examples of this government working in partnership with Albertans and providers to improve health care.

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

Calgary Seniors

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-Glenmore is home to many seniors. In fact, about 20 per cent of my constituents are seniors, those individuals that have built Alberta and are deserving of our continued care and support. At my town hall a few weeks ago constituents asked for assurances that health care supports that allow seniors to stay in their homes will be available to them. My question is for the Minister of Health. Can the minister provide details specific to Calgary on the plan to assist seniors to stay in their homes?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I must congratulate her. Over 20 per cent of people in her constituency are seniors, and she's certainly a champion in our caucus for seniors' issues. In the hon. member's constituency the biggest program is home care, which helped nearly 109,000 seniors, people with disabilities, and others stay in their homes last year, including 32,000 people in the Calgary region. There are many other supports like the seniors' property tax deferral program, the seniors' benefit, special needs assistance program, and others that are assisting to keep seniors at home as long as possible.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Minister. Given that many of these same seniors will move to long-term care, what assurances can I give my constituents that sufficient beds will be available close to their homes, their friends, and their support networks?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can give great assurance to her constituents. Under the leadership of the hon. Associate Minister of Seniors, I'm happy to tell the House that there are over 6,300 continuing care spaces in Calgary, representing nearly 30 per cent of the provincial total, including 557 in the hon. member's constituency. At the moment we have in process 692 new supportive living spaces in Calgary through the affordable supportive living initiative, which we announced during Seniors' Week in June. There are many other improve-

ments and supports for seniors to assist them to live independently that are in play across the province, particularly in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. Again, to the same minister: because my office regularly receives calls about the challenges families face as seniors are moved from home to hospital to seniors' care and to palliative care, can the minister provide details on how his department is working to make the processes for those transitions easier for families?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I have talked about this issue, and it is something that requires our attention as the number of people who are going to be transitioning between different levels of care increases. There are a number of initiatives in place like the destination home program, which provides support for enhanced home care for seniors who are able to move home from hospital to move sooner with the appropriate support. We are working with all the operators in the continuing care system to identify areas in the transition between levels of care that could be made smoother. Obviously, the role of case management, the role of home care, and the informal role that families play in providing these supports are key to doing better in this area.

Public-sector Pension Plans

Mr. Hehr: Continuing this government's assault on the middle class, the Minister of Finance made good on the threat he made in Budget 2013 to propose sweeping changes to four of the province's public-sector pension plans. I'm not sure if the minister knows this. Increasingly Albertans are finding it difficult to retire, and changing these public-sector plans will just ensure more seniors living in strife in this province. To the minister: why are you so eager to irreparably harm the retirement security of tens of thousands of hard-working middle-income Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's any huge secret to recognize that the demographics of our province, our country are changing. We have a lot more people living a lot longer than they ever were when these plans were put together. What we have today is a situation where we have a seven and a half billion dollar unfunded liability amongst these four plans. We have subsidized early retirement benefits that are no longer relevant to the type of workforce that we're trying to maintain and to keep. Incenting people to retire early is not exactly ensuring that we're going to have long-term pension plans for everyone in the system. What we're doing is ensuring that that plan is there for them when they are going to retire.

Mr. Hehr: Given that these public-sector plans have plans in place to deal with the unfunded liability and put these modest public pension plans back on solid footing, why is the minister being disingenuous in saying that these changes are necessary when the decision being made is simply a policy choice dedicated to further dismantling the middle class?

Mr. Horner: You know, Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about are the public-sector pension plans. We're not talking about all Albertans here. We're talking about public-sector plans. The idea that he refers to, that they gave us recommendations, was: "Wait. Let's see if interest rates rise. Let's see if our investments return better. Let's hope that it gets better in the future." That's not a plan. What we have put forward are some reasonable amendments

to the plans, some reasonable changes to the benefits. As well, we've changed the governance so that in the future if the plans do as well as the hon. member thinks they will, they could put these benefits back in if the plans could afford it.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given that a large number of Albertans have faithfully and dutifully served their province with the expectation of receiving a modest pension in retirement, where's the fairness in changing the rules mid-game?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the fairness is that I want them to actually get the promise that was set out in the first place. If we continue along this path, contribution rates by those very individuals that the hon. member is talking about would rise so high that they would have a lot less going in their pockets today even though it wouldn't ensure that the pension benefits they're hoping for in the future would be there. Mr. Speaker, these are reasonable amendments to ensure that the promises made to all of our public sector are going to be kept and the pension that they need and want is going to be there in the future.

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

Athabasca River Containment Pond Spill

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Five days ago one billion litres of coal waste water spilled into the Athabasca River. This PC government responded by assuring Albertans that the water is made up of "clay and organic matter." In the interests of cutting through PC spin, let's review the actual contents of the one billion litres of coal waste flowing down the Athabasca River today: arsenic, ammonium nitrate based explosives, mercury, and a dog's breakfast of other known carcinogens. This crisis threatens the health of Albertans along the Athabasca. To the minister of environment: why won't you be honest with them about that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, we are being honest with Albertans, and how we responded was that we were quickly on the scene with many different ministries, opening up a provincial operations centre as well, taking this situation very seriously, making sure that the water was sampled right away. Right now the early indications are that there are no health risks to humans, but we are asking municipalities not to draw water until we have further analysis done. We are taking this very, very seriously.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when B.C. experienced a coal containment pond leak near the Similkameen, the government issued clear instructions for the public not to come into contact with the water at all, and given that the B.C. contamination was 65,000 litres compared to our spill of one billion litres, to the same minister: why has your government been negligently silent so that most Albertans had to wait five days for a press release that finally warned of the risk to the public from this spill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we reacted right away. On our website right away we put up a notification to ensure that people were aware of the situation. We made sure that all the municipalities in the area were aware. Myself and my deputy minister visited the site with the local MLA and the mayor and reeve of Whitecourt to make sure that people were aware. All

notification was given. I don't know where this member gets her information from because every day we made sure that there was an update. We were on this file right from the start and continue to be.

Ms Notley: Well, given that I, like most Albertans, can only read the press releases – and they didn't say what you said they did – and given that the PC government's weekend response to the media was actually, "Don't worry; almost nobody drinks the water from the Athabasca River anyway," is this the new normal for environmental monitoring from this PC government, "Cool your jets. It's all good. It's only a billion litres of waste water containing arsenic, mercury, and lead"?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, we made sure that all of the municipalities were notified. Those municipalities are not drawing water off there, but we wanted to make sure that they had the information so that Albertans were made aware. We did make sure the information was there because we want to be overcautious, and so far there's no fish or wildlife mortality. The water is not affecting human health, and we have been on top of this from day one. Human health is our first priority and first concern, and that's what we took care of from day one on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of tinkering, this Health minister has all but broken our rural ambulance system. Interfacility transfers are leaving entire corridors of our province vulnerable and underserved while scarce EMS resources are juggled from region to region for nonemergency calls. This means long wait times, stress and confusion for front-line workers, who are forced to do more with less, and undue suffering for patients. This is a disgrace. To the Minister of Health: how are you going to fix the system you broke?

2:30

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was a question similar to this one last week, and the answer is what we have already done. This answer is the consolidation of ground ambulance dispatch services across this province. That system will ensure that ambulances that are called across their home border in order to assist with an emergency or an interfacility transfer can be easily identified and repatriated to their home community. We need the small number of remaining municipalities to work with us to complete the consolidation process so this sort of situation doesn't occur.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the rural ambulance system seemed to work better before this minister and his bureaucrats got their hands on it, does this minister not realize that flexing scarce ambulance resources from region to region on nonemergency calls and leaving vast areas of our province without immediate service has caused major problems for rural Alberta, or does he just not care?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I have met with many elected officials from rural communities across the province, as have many of my own colleagues who are from rural constituencies themselves, to discuss these issues. What the municipalities are telling us is not to turn the clock back to 1950 or 1960 or 1970 but to work with

them to ensure that the latest in technology and that the most current resources are available to their communities as they are in cities and larger centres. This initiative is about one thing, and that is making EMS part of health care.

Mr. Stier: Well, I don't think that's quite true, again, Mr. Speaker.

Given that last week this Health minister said that the current ambulance system was "completely in line with what Albertans expect" and that wait times in some regions of the province are averaging as high as 45 minutes or longer, will the minister finally own up to his mistake and admit his failed flex dispatch vision is putting patients at risk, or should Albertans just expect more of the same from this tone-deaf PC government?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this government initiated a review of ground ambulance services by the Health Quality Council, an evidence-based review which looked at the elements that would create a system that would provide the best possible quality of services to all Albertans regardless of whether they live in a rural or an urban community. We make decisions based on that evidence. We work collaboratively with partners to implement decisions. We have a few municipalities still working with us to complete the changes, but in the areas where they have taken effect, they are working. I invite the hon. member to consider that.

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

Natural Gas Industry

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's natural gas business is undergoing phenomenal change. It's been turned upside down by increased production of shale gas at a remarkable pace. Many gas producers in Alberta struggle to reorient in a world of persistently low natural gas prices. To the Deputy Premier and Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Ed: what is your ministry doing to address this competitiveness challenge for gas producers in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question for our industry. We know that the price of the commodity has been at a record low for quite some time right now, but we also know that through proper policy changes and the encouragement and attraction of investment we could turn our gas industry into a value-added gas industry that is not as dependent on the basic price of the commodity but actually on the price of the value-added product. So one of the things that we are doing now is working with industry to develop a value-added industry.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: To the same minister: in that policy how are you recommending we leverage the natural gas experience and resources of Albertans, the facilities, the existing infrastructure, and the know-how?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we definitely in the province have the talent – there's no doubt about it – within the industry and our postsecondary institutions. We definitely have the infrastructure that is needed. What we need is more trans-Canadian infrastructure to get product to markets. But we already have some examples of success. Recently I was at a Methanex plant, where they're looking at upgrading gas into significantly higher value, producing fertilizer and other products. That is what we can be great at, and that is what we're working on.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Again to the Deputy Premier: what is your ministry doing in conjunction with the natural gas industry to ensure that the industry gets through this period of challenge?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working on attracting venture capital because it takes a great deal of money to convert current plants into value-added plants. Our Premier and our Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations are working on making sure that we have the markets abroad for selling those value-added products. Most importantly, we have to have the pipelines, and we have to have the means of transportation to deliver those value-added products to other parts of the world. That is what all of us are working on as a team.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Disaster Recovery Program Claims

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the June floods in Medicine Hat I witnessed extraordinary Albertans who were more selfless and courageous than I could ever imagine possible. It was truly inspiring as they spent their days sandbagging, helping neighbours, and opening their homes to strangers. The flood damage cannot be rectified quickly, but the government has an obligation to make sure DRP funding reaches Albertans who qualify in a timely manner. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why has some assistance taken so long to get to victims like those in Medicine Hat?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I've mentioned this before. Talking about the 2010 floods, we had thousands of people who made DRP claims, and all but five residential claims have been resolved. In those five claims there are some extenuating circumstances. I won't get into them, but I can assure the member that our job is to ensure that the dollars we spend are spent wisely and people get the fair amount but not more than what they request.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier promised to look after the flood victims and given that after four months of waiting many Albertans with legitimate claims tell me that funding through DRP is wrapped up in too much red tape, will the minister commit to streamlining the process for the victims of Medicine Hat and those around the province?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we make the commitment every day to streamline the process as much as possible. In all 30 communities that experienced significant floods this June, I can already say that just last week we found another step in the process that we could mitigate against, and we did so in conjunction with the federal government, which also has very strict criteria to make sure we account for every single taxpayer dollar.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the biggest complaint with DRP funding is that the full claim cannot be paid until the insurance portion has been settled, will the minister agree today to review outstanding cases and request DRP take the lead to work collaboratively with the victims and their insurance companies to resolve these claims? Why can't they work together, Minister?

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, we have some incredible, hard-working staff at Municipal Affairs working on the DRP program, and I'm proud of the work that they've done. In fact, the Minister

of Finance and I just had a great conversation with all of the insurance companies that operate and are involved in this flood to indicate to them that our process has been streamlined and that we encourage them to streamline their process. We came up with some very new and very vigorous ideas on how we could continue to make sure we work together because we all serve the same client, and that's those who were affected by this flood and deserve justice. We will continue to advocate for them.

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

Highway 2 Cardiff Road Interchange

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest concerns in my constituency is the safety issue at the Cardiff intersection just south of Morinville. An overpass was slated to be built. The land was acquired, and some of the preliminary work was completed. When the necessary 2013 budget was passed, the Cardiff overpass had to be taken off the three-year Alberta Transportation construction program. I fully support the need to live within our means, so that's not the issue. The issue is the safety concern. My constituents continue to be very concerned about safety at this corner. To the Minister of Transportation. The degree of collision problems is approximately eight crashes per year, 50 per cent being injury-type . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair is here. Who wishes to respond to this? The Minister of Transportation.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member. I know that this issue is something she's been very diligent in addressing with my office. She's right to be impatient. We have been looking at a number of options. I think quite soon we'll be able to take some of those options to the good people near the Cardiff corner to look at what there is. In the meantime I would be remiss if I didn't say that safety is a two-way street. The government has our role, and we need to do it, but we also need to remind drivers to obey the rules of the road to make sure that safety does take place.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the mayors of Sturgeon and the town of Morinville, both of them being brand new – congratulations to them – look forward to a meeting with you and your department staff as soon as possible to deal with this very important issue?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, of course they can. As the hon. member knows, we routinely meet with municipalities from across Alberta, and it is very valuable for us because then we get our best advice on what the priorities of Albertans are at the local level. That helps us with the advice from the hon. member to gauge what part of building Alberta under the Premier's direction would be of the most benefit to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I'm just wondering if you could give us some sense of time. Would it be possible to do any work in the winter?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't answer that in detail, but I can say to the hon. member that when we meet with the municipal

leaders in the area and when we decide on what the right solution is, we won't waste time. We will get busy at our first opportunity in making a difference because, as the hon. member rightly points out, this is a safety issue and one that needs to be addressed. I can assure her that she can count on my co-operation and Alberta Transportation's.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time for question period has expired. In 25 seconds from now we will continue with Members' Statements, beginning with Calgary-Hawkwood, then Edmonton-McClung, then Calgary-Mountain View.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Arbour Lake Community

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood I am proud to share that this summer the Calgary edition of *Avenue* magazine named a community in my constituency, Arbour Lake, as the best community in the city. *Avenue* magazine's ranking included such things as an eight-month-long online poll that asked Calgarians to complete a survey about qualities they most value in a neighbourhood. Additional information such as housing prices and the number of restaurants and retail outlets for each neighbourhood is also added to the data.

Anyone who has had the opportunity to visit Arbour Lake probably knows why Arbour Lake is deserving of the best community title. The lake itself is the focal point of the community and brings people together for a wide variety of activities, including stand-up paddleboard and fishing derbies. Arbour Lake is also home to excellent medical facilities, including family medicine, dentistry, chiropractic, and diagnostic imaging clinics.

Aside from the excellent physical setting I cannot emphasize enough that the most outstanding quality of Arbour Lake is its highly engaged community of citizens. Residents of Arbour Lake enjoy a sense of pride, a sense of belonging, and a sense of ownership. This is in part due to the great work that is done by the staff and volunteers of the Arbour Lake Community Association and the residents' association.

As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, some of the leaders are here today sitting in the gallery. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication and service to the people of Arbour Lake. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank residents and the businesses of Arbour Lake for making your community one of the best in the city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share with you Alberta's ongoing advocacy efforts opposing the United States' country of origin labelling rules, also known as COOL. The rules require that meat derived from animals born, reared, or slaughtered outside the United States must be labelled to indicate the country or countries involved.

COOL has resulted in extra tracking and segregation costs for Canadian hogs and cattle exported to the U.S. Alberta's position and Canada's position, which is backed by the World Trade

Organization, is that COOL is an unfair trade measure that does not protect consumers. It hurts the livestock industry on both sides of the border by imposing hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary costs.

We have been working closely with the federal government to pursue a fair resolution to this trade issue as part of our efforts to build Alberta by enhancing market access to our agriculture resources. Alberta's agriculture minister and I were in Kansas City in September and met with U.S. state legislators to rally support to change COOL. Mr. Speaker, we were pleased that the group passed a resolution acknowledging COOL's negative economic impact and calling on the U.S. Congress to reconsider. To date eight such resolutions have been passed in various forums of U.S. decision-makers.

This week our agriculture minister is in Chicago with Canadian officials and other provincial agriculture ministers to meet with the U.S. meat-packing industry to build additional support and momentum for change.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta continues to stand up for its livestock industry, and Alberta will continue to push hard until this issue is resolved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Private Delivery of Health Care Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-tiered health care is here. This government's ideology supporting private, two-tier funding and delivery of health care continues against the will of Albertans and despite their fiasco with the Health Resource Centre three years ago in Calgary. Small wonder there's a high level of distrust associated with both this PC government agenda and their mismanagement. Many sick and suffering Albertans are understandably looking to an ever-increasing number of private options. The overriding concern here must be preserving universal access to publicly delivered care.

Alberta Health Services has failed to achieve even their low benchmarks for wait times in testing, EMS response times, emergency room access, surgery, and access to long-term care. Delay translates into higher costs of health care, with complications every day.

Rather than focusing on stabilizing the system and strengthening prevention, primary care, home care, and long-term care – real solutions – the PCs have turned to increasing the depth and breadth of privatization à la Bill 11, the third way, and the rebranded 2010 Alberta Health Act, that is still not proclaimed. Two-tiered health care is already a fact in Alberta. Individuals with separate insurance or sufficient funds can avail themselves of services provided by a range of private diagnostic, wellness, and surgical clinics.

Obviously, the situation raises ethical concerns. How do we stop the loss of physicians into the more attractive private-care options? What are the mechanisms to prevent physicians billing both patients and Alberta Health, worsening our wait times? The draft guidelines from the College of Physicians & Surgeons are welcome, and they would make it illegal to reject patients in boutique clinics on the basis of their inability to pay a fee. The college is also looking at restricting faster access to public wait-lists based on private imaging. Private wait-list insurance is now available for a monthly premium. Who knew that queue-jumping is perfectly legal in another province, just not in your own?

As this government lurches from crisis to crisis in health care, few Albertans have confidence that this government can manage these issues to benefit all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm presenting two petitions. In the first petition there are 1,645 signatures of Albertans who request that the Legislature urge the government to take steps to "ensure the preservation and enhancement of the Pheasant Release Program." When adding these signatures to the other petitions that I presented in the spring, there are about 3,500 Albertans requesting support for the pheasant release program.

The second petition, signed by 188 Albertans, requests that the Legislature urge the government to "introduce a Bill to preserve Albertans' 65-year investment in the Pheasant rearing, release and hunting" program through a number of relevant departments and by providing "a fair share of province-wide lottery profits."

2:50

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 35

Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2013

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce Bill 35, the Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2013.

Bill 35 makes several minor amendments to the Financial Administration Act, which ensures the sound financial management of government. The key amendment proposed under Bill 35 is needed for government to effectively manage appropriations for capital projects that span fiscal years. Other proposed changes are primarily technical and administrative in nature and will help the government manage its day-to-day business. Alberta is one of the most fiscally responsible jurisdictions, and Bill 35 will not change that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Bill 40

Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 40, the Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act.

This legislation will implement the convention on the settlement of investment disputes between states and nationals of other states, commonly known as the ICSID convention. In today's competitive global economy it is increasingly important for Alberta to offer a special market that interests international investors and supporters. The convention promotes international investment by offering an effective regime for mutual resolution of investment disputes.

To date about 150 countries have ratified the convention. The federal government announced on November 1 that it has formally

ratified the convention to ensure the implementation of the convention in all of Canada, and the federal government is encouraging all the provinces and territories to integrate their own implementation legislation.

Moving forward with the implementation of the ICSID convention is a positive step to create certainty for investments both in Alberta and abroad, sustaining success and prosperity for all Albertans now and in the generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

The Speaker: Are there any others?

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that that last bill be added to Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 19(5) of the Auditor General Act I would like to table five copies of the report titled Report of the Auditor General of Alberta October 2013. Copies of this report will be distributed momentarily.

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

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of four newspaper articles heralding last week's achievement of Fort McMurray being designated by the Canada Border Services Agency as a port of entry. This is a great boost for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. YMM has now been notified that the status has been established effective October 7, 2013. This announcement means that long-term planning for more international and U.S. transporter, passenger, and air cargo services can continue.

I proudly table these articles on behalf of my constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark and Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. First, I'll do a tabling on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

An Hon. Member: The Leader of the Official Opposition?

Ms Blakeman: Oh. I'm sorry. Too many years. Sorry. The leader of the third-party opposition.

This is the FOIP that he referred to in his question regarding new furniture purchase, design consultation, and many, many e-mails back and forth about the finishes and where it was all going to go for the Deputy Premier and minister of advanced education.

The second tabling is from my office, the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We have a report of letters that we received from concerned citizens who wrote to us with regard to changes in the land titles office. That's Sharon Murphy, Trevor Zimmerman, Robert Lavoie, Donna Sheplawy, Chantelle Kossakowski, and Rosellina Giardino. I've given the text of the typical letter.

Thank you very much.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by Mr. Rowe, hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills; Mr. Donovan, hon. Member for Little Bow; and Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on April 17, 2013, Department of Municipal Affairs main estimates debate.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm just going to revert to a tabling from Cardston-Taber-Warner, whose request I overlooked inadvertently.

Cardston-Taber-Warner, please proceed with your three tablings.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't take that personally. I know how busy you are.

I wish to table a document that was e-mailed to me from a very concerned constituent, Sharon, and her husband, Darrel Unger. They've got property that AltaLink transmission lines are potentially proposed to go across. They're trying to sell their home and are unable to because of the uncertainty of where the lines will be. Prospective purchasers have withdrawn offers. That will be number one.

Number two is a letter from John Leahy, a constituent from the Taber area, who advises:

At present, if there is an oil and gas facility . . . on your property, the MD or County assesses and bills the oil company . . .

The property taxes on their facilities are paid by the oil company.

However, if there is a wind turbine or substation on your property, the MD or County adds the value of the facilities to the landowners assessment and [then] bills the landowner for his taxes.

He thinks this is an inequity that needs to be addressed.

The third is from a registry office in rural Alberta in a small town, Milk River. Gail Matlock operates Matlock Registries, where very important services are provided to rural Alberta. She's concerned about the changes that are being proposed, details of which they don't have now, but she thinks the changes being proposed may threaten the survivability of their business.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded, and we can move on.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Motion to Concur in the Report from the Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Bill 204

Irlen Syndrome Testing Act

[Debate adjourned October 28: Mrs. Jablonski speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to speak to the concurrence motion regarding the referral of Bill 204, the

Irlen Syndrome Testing Act, to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. Respectfully, I would like to speak against concurrence in the report on Bill 204.

In many ways I'm grateful that Bill 204 underwent this very important part of the legislative process. I've discovered, as demonstrated in new research from the University of Lethbridge by Dr. Noëlla Piquette and Dr. Charles Boulet, that if not caught early, children's vision problems may be mistaken for learning disabilities. Mr. Speaker, did you know that fewer than 15 per cent of children have their vision tested before they start school? Testing vision is a critical component of helping children achieve success in school because you need to read to succeed.

3:00

As detailed in the final report, the Standing Committee on Families and Communities received 75 written submissions from interested citizens, concerned medical professionals, and experts: 50 in support and 25 not in support. I also received dozens of e-mails and letters of support that were not submitted to the committee, and I know that a number of my colleagues also support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the report from the committee recommends that the bill not proceed to second reading in the House. Although I very much respect this decision and the concerns of my colleagues in this Legislature, I believe that we owe it to the children of our province to do everything we can to ensure their success in the classroom. Irlen syndrome is a perceptual problem associated with the brain's ability to process images. In many cases individuals with Irlen's see a printed page differently although they don't realize that they do. Such distortions include words or letters which appear to move, swirl, and shimmer. This can prevent many people and children from reading effectively, efficiently, or even at all. What is most detrimental about Irlen syndrome is that academic and work performance, behaviour, attention span, and the ability to concentrate are negatively affected by this condition.

Scientific research is finally catching up to the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who know that this condition is very real and that it causes unnecessary suffering, stress, and academic difficulties for many Albertans.

The huge impact of this condition was evident in the number of citizens who submitted written submissions to the standing committee. As detailed in the final report on Bill 204, six invited parties made oral presentations before the committee, and approximately 50 observers from rural and urban centres in Alberta were present to show their support for the proposed legislation. We also conducted a video conference in committee with Dr. Sandra Tosta from California to detail the latest studies and findings about visual stress, or Irlen's.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Visual perception plays a crucial role in school success and is very much an area of ongoing study. In fact, just last week Dr. Charles Boulet, a developmental optometrist researching at the University of Lethbridge, along with Dr. Noëlla Piquette released an important paper regarding the impact of visual impediments on childhood learning. Dr. Boulet also submitted a written response as part of the committee review process. Recently published in the journal *Optometry & Visual Performance*, this paper asserted that visual impediments to learning, or VIL, which includes visual stress, or Irlen's, are often missed or overlooked in common sight screenings. As a result, this leads to difficulties with reading, memory, emotional awareness, and impulse control in children.

Mr. Speaker, fewer than 15 per cent of children have their vision tested comprehensively despite the fact that 80 per cent of

learning is dependent on vision. Dr. Piquette even goes as far as asserting that this lack of appropriate VIL detection and management combined with compulsory participation in a visually taxing education model for 12 years or more may well constitute an implicit neglect of children's health and basic human rights.

Current models of visual screening allow many significant problems to pass through as false negatives. Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 204 is a start to addressing possible gaps in the system when it comes to visual screening. I very much believe that we need a protocol in place that detects a wider range of learning-related vision problems. We already have processes in place like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, which offers complimentary examinations and free glasses to kindergarten children, and the government of Alberta pays for eye exams until age 18. It has been shown that if vision is adequately managed from an early age, academic and health problems are greatly improved. Ultimately, this could lead to a reduced long-term cost in education and in health.

If Bill 204 were referred back to the House for second reading debate, it would be debated in its current form. That means that the suggested amendments that I brought before the committee, which I believe would have improved the bill by addressing the stakeholder concerns raised in the written submissions and public hearings, would not be considered until Committee of the Whole debate. One of these concerns raised during the committee process was that many professionals perceive the use of the name "Irlen" as a proprietary name. In response to this, I propose changing the title of the bill to the Visual Stress Testing Act and removing "Irlen" from the contents of the legislation altogether. This way many other visual impediments to learning would be encompassed under the broader umbrella of visual stress in which Irlen's is included.

Some medical professionals, including representatives from the AMA and the Alberta College of Optometrists, were concerned that Bill 204 was too prescriptive and that much of the research surrounding Irlen syndrome was inconclusive. They're behind in the research.

Over the extent of this process I have been able to bring needed awareness to an issue within our communities, an issue which is not only important to me but to the many Albertans who have been aided by coloured, filtered Irlen lenses. Many children who were once unjustifiably labelled by their peers as stupid, as classroom disruptors, and as lazy simply because they have difficulty focusing on class assignments as they cannot read have been aided thanks to the Irlen Institute.

Mr. Speaker, I brought this bill before the Assembly to raise awareness about Irlen syndrome as well as visual stress. I've heard over and over again from teachers, students, and parents: "Why wasn't I told about this sooner? Why didn't my doctor tell me about this? What can be done to change this for other families?" The most critical and heart-wrenching question of all is: where would my child be today if I had been made aware of this earlier?

By speaking against concurrence in the report on Bill 204, I hope to once again raise the profile and awareness surrounding visual impediments to learning. Allowing Bill 204 to continue in second reading debate and later in Committee of the Whole would enable appropriate amendments to be made, ensuring that this bill is properly crafted, including many of the valuable comments and insights that my colleagues have provided over this review process. Mr. Speaker, I'm only asking that Bill 204 be allowed to be debated in second reading so that everyone can see its benefits and so that it can be amended and implemented.

I'd like to thank all of my colleagues from the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for their time, their patience, and their understanding in reviewing Bill 204. Mr.

Speaker, I think one of the best things we can do for our children in this province is to make sure that their vision is tested adequately and that we provide the tools for success, because you need to read to succeed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of concurring with the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in the matter of Bill 204. At the outset I would like to say that I know how much time and dedication my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has invested. She's done an excellent job of creating awareness about eyesight issues, and I would like to commend her for her dedication and her hard work.

As much as I would like to support the hon. member in her endeavours, however, as someone with a science background I've got to listen carefully to the objections and evidence presented to the committee by the scientists and the professionals in the field, whom we in Alberta have entrusted with safeguarding the interests of their professions and those of the public, and that would include the Alberta College of Optometrists, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Physicians & Surgeons.

Mr. Speaker, we as legislators cannot always say that we know better than the experts, especially when it comes to issues of treatment of medical issues. We have an obligation to listen to the experts whom we recognize in their fields of expertise. Accordingly, I support the committee's decision that Bill 204 not proceed. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta had two issues with the proposed legislation: first, the propriety of screening for any type of condition in this setting; and secondly, the scientific validity of screening, testing, and treating what is known as Irlen syndrome.

The Alberta College of Optometrists gave several reasons for not recommending that Irlen syndrome screening or testing proceed, including the fact that the screening would take place "by a screener that is 'certified' by the Irlen Corporation," which is "not regulated by any provincial or Federal legislation."

Secondly, the college states that validated and independent investigations do not support the claims made by the Irlen Corporation or its sponsored researchers.

Thirdly, the college states that the cost of an Irlen screening is about five times the cost of more complete eye exams by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

3:10

The submission of the Alberta Medical Association, which consulted with physicians in its sections of pediatrics and ophthalmology, strongly opposes the content of Bill 204 and also disputes the claims that Irlen Syndrome is a legitimate vision disorder. It also cited reputable professional organizations in the United States, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American association of pediatric ophthalmology, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Association of Certified Orthoptists. In a joint statement all of these organizations said: "Diagnostic and treatment approaches [for dyslexia] that lack scientific evidence of efficacy, including eye exercises, behavioral vision therapy, or special [colored] filters or lenses, are not endorsed . . . [or] recommended.

Accordingly, the Alberta Medical Association "urges the government to withdraw this bill." Dr. Ian MacDonald from the

AMA section of ophthalmology presented compelling reasons as to why recognizing the legitimacy of Irlen syndrome would be problematic. Dr. MacDonald stated that the validity of published materials supporting the prescription of tinted lenses to counteract reading impairment had shown "serious flaws in their methods," also citing inconsistencies in their results.

AMA's senior medical adviser, Dr. Mittelsteadt, also reiterated their position stating that "based on the scientific evidence . . . we cannot support Bill 204," citing several reasons. Dr. Mittelsteadt claimed that enshrining Irlen syndrome within legislation when there is not enough evidence to either recognize that it is a definitive diagnosis or recognize that the treatment for this syndrome is efficacious would not be advisable and may put undue pressure on school boards.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for her passionate efforts in regard to improving the lives of children across Alberta. While the intent behind Bill 204 is admirable; namely, to assess and help children with reading difficulties, I have to rely on the best evidence of those whom we in Alberta recognize as the leaders in and the spokespersons for their professions. For these reasons, I speak in favour of concurrence of the final report of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities on Bill 204, which recommended that Bill 204 not proceed, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to rise today in this Assembly to speak against concurrence in the report on Bill 204, the Irlen Syndrome Testing Act, brought forth by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. To begin, I would like to acknowledge the hon. member for bringing this issue to our attention. Her passion for literacy and her attempt to enhance the education of our youth is to be commended. I'm glad this issue has garnered attention in this House. As educators I hope that by raising awareness of Irlen syndrome, we can indirectly assist those who may suffer from it and other learning impairments.

Irlen syndrome is also known as scotopic sensitivity syndrome, or visual stress, and is a condition which adversely affects the literacy skills of children and adults. In many cases it causes the distortion of words and numbers, inhibiting reading ability and math skills. In my view, when you can improve the lives of children and people so that they can live a better life, that is an important mission.

Mr. Speaker, our education system in this province is its greatest institution. It equips our students with the skills they need in order to be successful in postsecondary schooling and, of course, in their chosen career. Our province is fortunate to have one of the greatest education systems in the world, with some of the best teachers and the brightest minds. Together this bodes well for our future labour force and the economic prosperity of our province.

Bill 204 attempts to supplement our education system in a rather unique way, by establishing a screening process for students who display symptoms of Irlen syndrome. School systems would be required to have certified screeners available and to provide testing upon parental consent and after it is suggested by an educator. The screener would be able to determine the severity of the condition and in some cases provide coloured overlays, which could alleviate the symptoms. In more severe cases the screener may recommend further testing by an Irlen diagnostician who, in turn, could prescribe coloured lenses for glasses. This treatment method for many appears to be successful and helps to minimize the symptoms of Irlen syndrome.

Bill 204 represents an opportunity to maximize the learning potential of our youth who struggle with Irlen syndrome. It is very unfortunate and sad that some people have spent their entire lives with this problem and were not aware of it until later on in adult years. As we have heard from the Member for Red Deer-North, the Standing Committee on Families and Communities received written submissions from approximately 50 individuals who had experienced this first-hand. Mr. Speaker, by identifying this condition at an early age, we could enhance the lifestyle of many Albertans, making their educational and professional experiences more fulfilling.

I certainly agree with the underlying premise of this legislation, but in saying this, we should consider expanding this bill's scope to include other learning impairments and also consider carrying out additional research regarding Irlen syndrome. This is something that the hon. member proposed as a possible recommendation to the committee. Through this legislative process my colleague wished to expand Bill 204 to encompass visual stress, which includes Irlen syndrome.

Currently there are many learning impairments which exist and adversely affect one's educational experience, and of course these impairments include auditory processing disorder, visual processing disorder, dyscalculia, dyslexia, and dysgraphia, to name a few. It is important that we assist those who suffer from these learning impairments. Mr. Speaker, most students with such learning disabilities are just as smart as everyone else, and they should be afforded the same opportunities as fellow students.

In order to achieve this, however, they need the necessary resources and specific teaching methods which are tailored to their learning styles. It is important that we do everything that we can to provide children with the supports to have a successful education and develop the foundations necessary to continue that education. Literacy plays a crucial role in that, and that is why I'm speaking today against concurrence with the report on Bill 204, which recommended that the bill not proceed in this Legislature.

Many children who do not get proper support may develop a negative self-image and fall into destructive habits, which are a disservice to themselves and in some cases the community as a whole. To expand upon my last point, it has been noted that 60 per cent of America's prison inmates are illiterate and that 85 per cent of juvenile offenders have reading problems. Given that there appears to be a relationship between illiteracy and deviant behaviour, it is important that we do all we can to assist those who struggle with learning complications.

To this end, Bill 204 helps achieve this, but in further discussion of this legislation I believe some important points should also be addressed. For one, given that this condition was discussed in the '80s, conducting more research concerning this issue may be beneficial in many respects. It may give us answers to crucial questions such as why the condition exists, how it originates, and who it is most likely to affect. A fulsome approach to testing will help enhance the quality of life for many Albertans and assist them with their learning difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for proposing the legislation. I know she is going to get a lot of questions and concerns raised about dollars and cents, but sometimes we have to look at humanity and not necessarily always at all the costs. I believe she is skimming the surface of a potentially large problem that is preventing our youth from achieving all they can accomplish academically.

I am speaking against concurrence for Bill 204 as I believe it is crucial that we assist our most vulnerable children by helping

them attain their dreams and achieve their greatest potential through education without barriers.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? I'll recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today in this Assembly to speak against concurrence with the report on Bill 204, Irlen Syndrome Testing Act, brought forth by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the hon. member for generating awareness about this condition and being the voice for literacy in our province. I know I can speak on behalf of all my colleagues when I say that the welfare of our children and youth is a top priority for all of us, and a proposal which could enhance their quality of life always deserves attention in this House.

Mr. Speaker, our children represent our future and are very valuable components of our society. In time they will be bestowed with the responsibility of carrying the great legacy of our province forward, helping to improve upon the work of the past generations, who have made Alberta one of the greatest places to work, live, and raise a family. As such, a piece of legislation which could affect their well-being is always of interest to me.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities as it reviewed the proposed legislation. We've heard from many concerned stakeholders, medical professionals as well as individuals who suffer from Irlen syndrome. After these hearings the committee recommended in its report on Bill 204 that the proposed legislation not proceed.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, in today's society literacy is the key to success. As is the case, and as a former teacher myself I'm glad this condition has been brought to my attention. In saying this, I am pleased to speak to the Irlen Syndrome Testing Act. This syndrome allegedly has many side effects, but most importantly it appears to inhibit one's ability to read properly. This occurs because of word distortion as people who have visual stress or even Irlen syndrome appear to view written text differently. In effect, this causes sufferers a level of discomfort and personal embarrassment as it appears as though they are incapable of reading and learning at the same pace as their peers. In addition to this, sufferers may exhibit a short attention span, and as a result they're often misdiagnosed with having ADHD and other attention-related disorders. Sometimes it can lead to an unwarranted use of prescription drugs such as Ritalin.

Mr. Speaker, Helen Irlen, a psychologist and Cornell University graduate, has developed a method which helps individuals suffering from Irlen syndrome. The procedure involves prescribing customized coloured lenses and overlays to individuals suffering from its effects. This is done by certified Irlen screeners and diagnosticians. Some of these screeners also presented before the committee as part of the public hearing.

Mr. Speaker, some scientific studies have shown this method to be quite effective as reading comprehension has improved drastically among children. On the other hand, some associations such as the American Optometric Association believe that more research should be done to investigate the effect that lenses have on reading performance. Associations here in Alberta like the Alberta College of Optometrists, who presented before the committee, also strongly oppose this testing on similar grounds.

Nevertheless, whatever the position of various organizations may be, if the potential to help a child exists, I believe the means by which it is achieved should be examined.

Mr. Speaker, although the committee recommended that the bill not proceed, I believe that Bill 204 has the potential of assisting children suffering from visual stress. It attempts to achieve this in two ways. Firstly, it seeks to ensure that educators are aware of symptoms of visual stress, which includes Irlen syndrome. This will enable teachers to identify sufferers and to communicate to parents what potential problems could be.

Secondly, Bill 204 seeks to set up a screening process within the education system to test children who teachers believe are suffering from this condition. Thereafter, sufferers could be prescribed coloured lenses to help improve reading ability, which in turn also likely increases overall school success.

Mr. Speaker, literacy is the key to providing our children with a promising future. We all benefit from a well-educated society, and this bill could help supplement the outstanding education system which we have established in this province already. It could act as a proactive piece of legislation which would be unparalleled in its uniqueness across this great country.

This being said, regardless of the outcome of this bill, regardless of findings of the report on Bill 204 I believe that by discussing this matter today, we are doing something proactive and beneficial for many children. We are generating an awareness of this issue. I also believe that by bringing this bill before the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, even more awareness has been generated. For this, I am very grateful. I would be willing to bet that few members in this House, if any, had ever heard of Irlen syndrome before this. By continuing to educate ourselves today and having a proactive conversation, we are expanding our knowledge base, whereby we can make a difference. I'm sure many of us have nephews, nieces, and family members who have difficulty with reading and writing, which adversely affects their schooling.

Mr. Speaker, in my estimation, it would certainly not hurt to discuss Irlen syndrome with them, and it's quite possible that they haven't even heard of it. In doing so, we could positively affect the life of a child or an adult, helping him or her to succeed in school, work, and literacy. Such action does not require a bill or a motion. It requires self-awareness and good intention, and this is something I believe we can all do to assist those who may be struggling with school. It is a small yet considerable action that can change the life of a person. In generating awareness, a ripple effect can be created, providing a possible solution to the educational struggle of many children and occupational difficulties of adults.

Mr. Speaker, as detailed in the report, I recommend: do further research into "the nature of visual conditions that require testing." In doing so, we will have a better idea of the fundamental questions which may exist relating to the nature of visual stress.

Mr. Speaker, I do not discount the potential effects of this syndrome or question its existence or how many children could be affected by it. I think that in referring Bill 204 to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, my colleagues have realized gaps in the proposed legislation. She's eager to address them. However, if this bill does not make it to second reading, she will not have the opportunity to do that. For this reason, I'm speaking against concurrence with the final report on Bill 204.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this condition not only to my attention but for being an advocate for children across our province. For that she should be commended. This bill has already achieved a lot in terms of

generating awareness. I believe it has provided us knowledge to make a difference in the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope all of you support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, if I could just ask you to keep the side conversations down while another member has the floor, please, it would be appreciated.

I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say a few words. This bill was referred to a committee, and the reason, I believe, that it was referred to a committee was so that we could have a really in-depth look at the issue, which is what we did. We did spend many, many hours on this – reading the materials, attending the meetings – so in respect to this process I do believe we should all support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize and thank the Member for Red Deer-North for all the work that she's done in raising awareness and educating us all about Irlen syndrome. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 was referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in the spring. As the Member for Calgary-Bow has just said, we went through a lengthy process and discussion. There were 75 written submissions and six oral presentations. We heard from the Canadian Association of Irlen Professionals, Dr. Sharon Vaselenak, and the Irlen Institute, who supported it. We also heard from the Alberta College of Optometrists. The Alberta Medical Association, as the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has pointed out, had some serious questions about the science. We also heard from the Alberta School Boards Association, who along with the departments of Health and Education in our recommendations want to do more for these kids and are recognizing Irlen syndrome and what it means to these children and their families and their progress.

I think the Alberta School Boards Association said it best, that we don't need a law for this to happen. I think everybody understands that we need to work towards doing better for these kids and that we will work towards doing better for these kids.

In light of that, the committee did spend many hours on this, with lengthy consultation, lengthy discussion, lengthy deliberation over this. We did come to the conclusion to report back to this Legislature with those recommendations, including that the bill, Bill 204, not proceed. So as chair of the committee I would urge all hon. members to concur in the report of the committee, and I would like to move to close debate.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 204. Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Some Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: That is carried.

**Motion to Concur in the Report
from the Standing Committee
on Resource Stewardship**

**Bill 205
Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2012**

[Debate adjourned October 28: Ms Calahasen speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise today to speak against the concurrence motion for Bill 205 as proposed by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship. I'd like to thank all colleagues on the committee who supported Bill 205 and also to bring attention to my commercial fishermen's plight. I want to say a special thank you. With respect, I do oppose the motion, of course, for Bill 205 to not proceed because I truly believe that Bill 205, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, would provide a formal mechanism by which concerned stakeholders could contribute to the determination of commercial fishing quotas each year as well as have the decisions posted so all can see and better understand the rationale for the decisions made. It was this bill that came about for my commercial fishermen to get resolution to concerns they have had with processes within ESRD's fisheries department.

Mr. Speaker, residents of northern Alberta, particularly in Lesser Slave Lake, also have a vested interest in the prosperity of this industry, and because these communities and their residents are directly affected, I felt that this topic deserved important consideration. This bill would give the industry an additional tool in continuing development of a viable commercial fishing industry, thereby contributing more to the provincial economy. With the requirement of published departmental reports online outlining consultations, this bill will strengthen governmental transparency and access to information in Alberta, a goal of our government.

This would contribute consistency and transparency across the province with a range of decisions made about fishing quotas and the processes that lead to their implementation. The rubric proposed by Bill 205 would require that the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development involve commercial fishermen in any change to the fishing quotas for the upcoming fishing season like any other industry. Bill 205 proposes that by submitting a request, fishermen will also be able to initiate the consultation process themselves as they see fit. Consultations with Albertans are of great importance to this government, and this bill would provide the opportunity to demonstrate that meaningful consultation with stakeholders would occur.

This is one of the reasons why I have a difficult time supporting that recommendation by the Resource Stewardship Committee to not proceed with the bill. The consultation process proposed by this bill is intended to ensure that stakeholder concerns are seriously considered and addressed. I know that Alberta fisheries regulations give authority to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to manage three-quarters of the province, and as such, the director of the fisheries management branch has the authority to determine and alter quotas, closing times for lakes, and any other limits placed on fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, section 13.1 of the regulation requires that the director give notice to all persons affected by any changes made to closing times, fishing quotas, or limits on size and weight of fish. While it is a requirement that commercial fishermen be made aware of changes to the industry that impact their livelihoods, there is currently no legislative requirement that government

consult with commercial fishermen when determining quotas, nor is there a requirement to post these decisions or to explain why this is done. Concurring in the recommendations made by this committee report would continue this flawed process.

This bill would expand and formalize the existing consultation process and law under the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, and over the past year the government has held numerous consultations on issues that are important to Albertans. The feedback that we have received for many topics has been invaluable in helping us to make the informed decisions about changes Albertans want us to make. Bill 205 seeks not only to bring this type of dialogue to the fishing industry but to enshrine it in legislation. As a supporter of meaningful consultations I believe that stakeholders in the fishing industry should be consulted on quota decisions and that this information should be made transparent to all Albertans.

Through sponsoring this legislation, I believe that informal mechanisms are insufficient and that commercial fisheries and stakeholders would be better served by a legislative, formalized consultation process. Therefore, it is imperative that the legislative option be thoroughly scrutinized. What is certain is that we owe it to the Albertans who make their living in the commercial fishing industry to ensure that they're able to sustain themselves in the fairest and most efficient way possible.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I understand and appreciate the process being recommended by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship on Bill 205, and I know that this minister will move mountains to see good things happen for my constituents. But, as we all know, ministers change, and that's the other reason. If it's legislated, I know it's a little harder to change. I believe my commercial fishermen need to be heard throughout the whole process, and I ask that this Legislature consider moving this forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose this motion from the committee. It's quite interesting. In the committee, which I was part of, we heard the reasons presented, particularly by ESRD, on why they didn't want this bill to go forward, why they didn't agree with making consultation mandatory, and I have to tell you quite honestly that there was no logic to their argument, in my view. What was very clear – and the minutes of the meeting actually support this – was that where the government consulted, the process worked. Where they didn't consult, it didn't work. In effect, where they were not consulting was in dealing with Métis and aboriginal peoples, and that was disconcerting to me.

I will tell you this. The consequence – and I am not making any allegation here whatsoever – of the failure to have consistent consultation is, in effect, racist if it affects just one certain race or certain aboriginal people. That's not intentional on their part – I want to make that absolutely clear – but that's the outcome.

When the bill was brought forward, what it said was that we're just going to make consultation mandatory all across the spectrum. The ministry agrees that when they consult, it works. When they don't consult, the process fails, and what is absolutely clear from the evidence provided is that they are failing to consult, particularly when dealing with Métis and First Nations people. That's a problem, and it needs to be corrected. By making it a legislative mandate, we clean up our problem. The ESRD does exactly what it needs to do and what it says that it wants to do, which is consult.

Now, the thing that gets me on this thing is that I understand why the committee made its recommendation. I heard the arguments. But for this Assembly not to allow the member to bring that bill forward so it at least could be debated in this Assembly and let it suffer whatever outcome it will go through – at least allow the process. Allow it to be heard. That's why I stand and join this member in opposing this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak against this concurrence motion for the report on Bill 205. Like the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, I reject concurring in the recommendation from the committee report on Bill 205 put forward by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, which recommends to the Assembly that the bill not proceed. I commend the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this issue to the attention of this House. Bill 205 would provide a formal mechanism for fishermen to contribute to the determination of commercial fishing quotas each year. It would give them the opportunity to be involved in an open, transparent decision-making process that affects their industry.

Mr. Speaker, this could be a positive step in the right direction because commercial fishing is an important component in the ecological management of Alberta's water resources. Commercial fisheries in fresh waters and oceans are important parts of Canadian lifestyle and the economy. Each year the industry employs over 50,000 people, and it supports many families and communities. Because Alberta has fewer lakes and rivers than other provinces, sustainable management of our freshwater resource is vital.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, fishing can have a considerable influence on the environment. In order to manage our resources responsibly and create a healthy and viable ecosystem for Albertans, we need to examine the roles of commercial fisheries. Bill 205 would mandate a consultation process whereby commercial fishermen would have an opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their industry.

Mr. Speaker, residents in northern Alberta, particularly in Lesser Slave Lake, have a vested interest in the prosperity of this industry, and because these communities and their residents are directly affected, they need to be assured of a transparent and accountable process, a gold standard. This bill would give the industry an additional tool in continuing development of a viable commercial fishing industry, thereby contributing more to the provincial economy. This would contribute to consistency and transparency across the range of fishing quotas and the processes that led to their implementation.

The criteria proposed by Bill 205 would require that the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development inform commercial fishermen of changes to the fishing quotas for the upcoming fishing season. Concurring with the recommendation from the committee report on Bill 205 would mean that the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development would continue to operate under the nonobligatory procedures that are currently in place. This is in line with existing regulations.

In order to understand the significance of this bill, the importance of the commercial fishing industry in northern Alberta needs to be examined. Alberta's commercial fishermen harvest fish from

a limited number of lakes throughout the province. Fish that are commercially caught in the province are sold to markets in Alberta and North America via a tightly controlled and well-regulated process. Fish populations are regulated through controlled harvesting as well as seasonal and area closures. Species such as lake whitefish are targeted in order to minimize the catch of nontarget fish such as walleye and lake trout. In addition, commercial fishermen require a licence to operate in the province. At present no new commercial fishing licences are available. As a result, commercial fishermen purchase licences from fishermen who are retiring. Commercial fishing in Alberta primarily revolves around gillnet fishing, which involves stringing out vertical panels of netting in the water, thus entrapping fish that swim into its path.

Approximately 2 million kilograms of fish contributed slightly over \$3 million to local economies from 1999 and 2000 statistics. Compared to other provinces, however, Alberta has a relatively low number of fish-bearing lakes, with an approximate total of 1,100. Saskatchewan has an estimated 94,000 fish-bearing lakes, Manitoba has 110,000, while Ontario has 250,000. Compare that to Alberta's 1,100.

Mr. Speaker, since a high proportion of Alberta's population lives in central and southern Alberta, fish resources in the surrounding areas are depleted more rapidly than in the northern parts, which have much less of the human population but much more of Alberta's fish-bearing waters. Since Bill 205 focuses on the development of a transparent and accountable process for fishermen in the commercial fishing industry in northern Alberta, it may give the industry a much-needed push by highlighting opportunities that exist there. Unfortunately, concurring in the committee's report's recommendation on Bill 205 will rob fishermen of an accountability mechanism.

Northern Alberta's boreal forest contains the vast majority of lakes in the province. These lakes include game fish such as yellow perch, northern pike, walleye, lake whitefish, Arctic grayling, and lake trout. Given that the majority of Alberta's fish-bearing lakes are located in the northern part of the province, it may be reasonable to promote commercial fishing efforts there. Northern Alberta contains 60 per cent of Alberta's landmass and approximately 9.5 per cent of our province's total population. This poses several challenges to the area as there is an ongoing need to diversify the region's economic portfolio.

Estimates suggest that the northern regional economy of our province has contributed to approximately 17 per cent of our GDP, or \$41 billion. About 56 per cent of this comes from the mining, oil, and gas sectors. Other contributors include construction, agriculture, transportation, and warehousing. Because there is an extremely strong focus on resource extraction, the economy is more open to market volatility than economies with a more varied economic profile.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 falls in line with this agenda by promoting an open, transparent, and accountable process that helps fishermen contribute to a sustainable economic initiative for northern Alberta. Alberta's northern region is home to world-class natural landscapes that boast majestic forests and lakes. This is why in 2004 an estimated 1.5 million people visited the region, contributing around \$350 million to local economies. Given that most of Alberta's fish-bearing lakes are located in the northern part of our province and given that there is a need to create increased economic opportunities in that area, it may be beneficial to promote commercial fishing as a viable industry. A more robust commercial fishing industry could enable local fishermen to find suitable markets for their fare while infusing the local economy.

Bill 205 helps to ensure that fishermen are given an opportunity to take part in an open, transparent, and accountable process to help that local economy prosper. However, Mr. Speaker, ensuring fishermen are given the opportunity to take part in a transparent process involves rejecting, concurring in the recommendations from the committee report on Bill 205 put forward by the Legislative Policy Committee on Resource Stewardship, which recommends to the Assembly that the bill not proceed. I'm encouraging all members to rethink that process and to support that the bill do proceed.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this bill before the House for debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others before I ask the committee chair to close debate? Seeing none, I'll invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship I am very happy to speak to this bill. The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has shown exemplary concern for the people in her constituency and, I think, for commercial fishermen in general. She's raised awareness of this issue for several years, culminating – I'm sure not finally culminating – in the review that was conducted by this standing committee.

We spent a long time in the committee reviewing the legislation that exists and the enforcement mechanisms and the practices. We asked the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to come before our committee and explain their practices across the province and in particular in the community that was affected in Lesser Slave Lake. We also asked for written submissions on practices from this same group. We invited constituents of Lesser Slave Lake to make their presentations, and they were able to do so very capably through this member.

Mr. Speaker, it would be wonderful if every time one of us had an issue like this that was of burning concern in our constituency, we could have specific legislation moved forward to address those issues. That would be a utopian environment for all of us, but that's just not practical. That was the conclusion of this committee. We felt that by bringing awareness to this issue in practice through enforcement of the regulations to the ministry and then by continuing to invite this ministry to our committee for the next three years – once, twice, whatever is required – to explain their practices, we were certainly putting them on notice that we cared about this, that we were expecting open and transparent procedures, and that we would be watching. We on the committee all felt, with few exceptions, that that was a reasonable practice and an effective use of government resources.

On that basis I continue to recommend that the bill not proceed and request the concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report that was tabled on Bill 205.

However, I can't sit down before I make note of the comments by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. To suggest that this decision was based on racism is preposterous and hugely offensive.

3:50

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been raised by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. Please proceed.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's vitally important in this Legislature that other members don't make false allegations, so I'm here under 23(h), (i), and (j). What happens when someone makes false allegations against another member is that it brings down the reputation amongst all of our members. What was very clear . . . [interjections] Do I speak to him or to you?

The Deputy Speaker: You speak to me, hon. member. There's no one else here.

Mr. Saskiw: Okay. Thank you. I wasn't sure. You know, he was yelling there.

Mr. Speaker, it denigrates the overall reputation of all members. We heard the comments from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. He made it clear, very, very clear, that he never suggested in one aspect whatsoever that any members of the committee were racist or anything like that in any regard, and to suggest that he did so is, quite frankly, outstanding. We in this Legislature would never make those types of allegations. Those types of allegations are very serious.

It is very clear, if you look at *Hansard* in this particular instance, that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre in no instance whatsoever said that any of the committee members were racist. What he did identify is that this bill may have particular aspects or implications for certain different groups. I know that in my area I have four First Nations reserves; I have two Métis settlements. Of course, this legislation may impact those individuals on a different basis than other individuals. That was what was said in his statement. For this member to suggest that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was in any way indicating that members of the committee were racist is beyond reproach, and I would suggest that you withdraw that comment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll invite the Deputy Government House Leader to respond.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening intently this afternoon, and I think it's without question that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre did mention – the recollection that I have is that he said that it was racist to only go to talk to one group of people that a particular piece of legislation impacted. The Member for Calgary-Varsity, I recall, had mentioned the word "racist" again as coming from that particular member. Now, I don't know what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre's intent was, but I don't find it much different from what the Member for Calgary-Varsity said. In any event, I don't have the Blues in front of me, and I would suggest perhaps that if you were not inclined to throw this point of order out, we take a look at the Blues and look at it at a subsequent juncture for re-examination.

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

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, briefly.

Mr. Anglin: Briefly, I want to be absolutely clear on this, and the record will make this absolutely clear. I said, "I am not making any allegation . . . whatsoever" about racism. What I did say is

that when something inadvertently singles out a certain class of people – and I believe I said: inadvertently – it has the effect of being racist, unfortunately. That doesn't mean that anyone is doing something deliberately. We have these situations that do happen, and that was the point I was trying to make.

Now, the member over there can shake his head, but what happened in that committee meeting was that there was one zone that was affected more than any other zone, and that zone is highly populated by Métis and aboriginal peoples. You can't get around that. What I was trying to say is that when that happens inadvertently, the effect is that it can be racist. That is not thrown out as any type of denigration to the decision or to the intent of the decision, but it is the effect of it. It's different to standing up and saying that I said that the decision was made because of racism. That's not what I was saying. I even used the word "inadvertently," and I said that I was "not making any allegation . . . whatsoever."

An Hon. Member: You're not helping yourself, Joe.

Mr. Anglin: I'm helping myself.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you just want to clarify? I don't expect that in any of your words you would have intentionally called on anyone in such a manner. Did you want to just offer a couple of brief comments before you get back into your remarks? Then I'll rule.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very harmful to all of us who are politicians when people extrapolate and make suggestions like the suggestion that was made, that by not consulting in a way that was comfortable for this particular member, we are denying access to consultation to certain categories of people. We were focused on the issues raised by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for a particular community. We looked at all of the commercial fishermen in that community. That was the focus of our review.

When I heard what was said by the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, as the chair of that committee – and he is the co-chair – I found it very misleading and troubling. I think that if my children were listening to this – and I certainly hope they're not – they would come to the conclusion that we as a committee had done something that was discriminatory. That's what I was trying to communicate, and I take offence at that suggestion.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I've listened to arguments both ways. I think we have got a word here that was used, and I think it was used in an attempt to convey a point. I heard arguments from both sides stating that it was not intended to be specific to anyone. I guess what I'm hearing is maybe just a difference in terms of how the term was used. I did not hear – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues either – anything that was directed at any individual by any of the speakers, so I'm going to accept this as just a point of clarification. I don't find a point of order. I would just ask us all to be very careful, particularly when we use language that certainly can have the opportunity to cause hurt in any way, that we be very careful with those words. With that, I find no point of order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, I invite you to finish your comments, and then we'll continue with the proceedings.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to conclude by again thanking the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for her work on behalf of her constituents. She certainly has an undertaking from the full committee to make sure that this question stays on the radar of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

On that basis I request the concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report on Bill 205, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2012.

Finally, I'd like to make note that we have a Resource Stewardship Committee meeting this evening, and I am sure that we will be very kind to one another.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship has requested concurrence on the report on Bill 205. Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Some Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: That is carried.

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

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order.

4:00

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

The Chair: I would invite the Member for Calgary-Currie to speak.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move an amendment to Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012.

The Chair: I'd ask the pages to distribute the amendment. If you'd pause for a moment while that's being distributed. For the record, hon. member, we will label this amendment A1.

Please proceed, hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to rise and open Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 206, the Tobacco Reduction (Flavoured Tobacco Products) Amendment Act, 2012. I would like to thank my colleagues from both sides of the House for bringing forth their perspectives on this very important topic during second reading. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing forward Bill 206 as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for sponsoring Bill 206 during second reading. Others have also had an impact on the development of this bill, and they include the Member for Calgary-Acadia and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I thank

them as well for their contributions, which have been aimed at protecting the health and well-being of our youth here in Alberta.

Firstly, I would like to quickly review key areas of Bill 206. Bill 206 proposes to enhance the Tobacco Reduction Act by prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco products. This amendment will protect our children from the temptation to engage in tobacco use. In my career as a principal I watched over the security and welfare of my students as though they were my own kids, and I will continue to do the same here in this Legislature. The health and welfare of our youth is our responsibility. By prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco products – peach, cherry, vanilla, berry, apple, citrus, chocolate, watermelon, which really belong in a package of Jolly Ranchers – when we do this, we will say no to the temptation faced by 14-year-olds in our province that lures them into trying an addictive substance by masking the harshness of tobacco. Fourteen, by the way, is the average age of our youth who begin or first try smoking.

As a province, taking necessary steps to prevent and reduce tobacco use among young Albertans will change our abysmal statistics. One stat in particular shows Alberta as having the highest rate of spit tobacco use in Canada. Most of these products are flavoured. Moreover, in 2011 Alberta experienced a 13 per cent increase in the sale of smokeless tobacco. The top selling? Flavoured products.

To be clear, Bill 206 is about our youth. It is about a bill that has the strength to protect our young people from the harmful effects of tobacco. We know the enormous burden tobacco use has on our health care system. Tobacco use continues to lead the pack as being the primary cause of preventable disease and death in Alberta. It is time we take back the reins and amend the Tobacco Reduction Act to prohibit someone from selling or offering to sell flavoured tobacco products. Mr. Chair, reducing the appeal of cigarettes by getting rid of flavoured tobacco products would help protect the health of our province's children, who may be more inclined to try smoking because of the flavour.

Bill 206 falls in line with many jurisdictions regarding the reduction of youth tobacco use. For instance, the federal government introduced an act to amend the Tobacco Act, which added provision 10(2), excluding the sale of tobacco products that include flavouring agents. Our neighbours to the west in B.C. passed the Tobacco Control Act, which forbids the sale of tobacco products that contain flavouring agents that were intended to modify or mask the unpleasant taste of the product alone.

The inclusion of section 7.4 in Bill 206 would align this legislation with what has already been implemented in federal and provincial jurisdictions and strengthened to prevent continued use of characterized flavours in tobacco products. Again, section 7.4(1)(a), (b), and (c) do just that by saying:

In this section, “flavoured tobacco product” means a tobacco product that

- (a) has a characterizing flavour,
- (b) is represented as being flavoured, or
- (c) is designated under the regulations as a flavoured tobacco product.

Mr. Chair, by amending the Tobacco Reduction Act and adding this provision, the act would be strengthened, making it harder for tobacco companies to target our children. The pith and substance of Bill 206 is about taking action to prevent and reduce tobacco use among youth by prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco products. We need this amendment to strengthen the enforcement of this regulation to ensure the protection of Alberta's youth from a market that portrays tobacco as fun, sexy, appealing when in

actuality it's enticing a new generation of youth into addiction to tobacco products that have lifelong serious health results.

The preamble of Bill 206 further details the reasons for amending the Tobacco Reduction Act, and I would like to highlight it. The preamble statement reads, “Whereas the popularity of flavoured tobacco among youth is increasing their risk of developing a dangerous and lasting addiction to tobacco products.” This section of the preamble outlines why Bill 206 is being proposed: because our province's youth are at a high risk of developing unhealthy addictions because of how tobacco is being marketed.

Our government has implemented several initiatives aimed at reducing underage smoking, which would help build a safer and healthier Alberta. For instance, in November 2012 Alberta Health released its strategy to prevent and reduce tobacco use entitled *Creating Tobacco-free Futures*. One statistic that could be attributed to this initiative was a decrease in youth smoking. When the tobacco reduction strategy was introduced in 2002, the rate of smoking in youth aged 15 to 19 dropped from 24 to 17 per cent by 2010. However, while this drop is significant, the 2010 figure pales in comparison to the rate from 2009, which was at 12 per cent.

Again, the inclusion of the preamble statement in Bill 206 is intended to highlight the growing popularity of flavoured tobacco products and the danger they represent to our youth. The subsequent preamble wording contained in Bill 206 reads:

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

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

Mr. Chair, while the first part of the preamble highlighted the popularity of flavoured tobacco use among youth and its risks, the rest of the preamble equally has important points to highlight. The preamble wording points out that similar legislation has been implemented in other jurisdictions in order to restrict the sale of certain tobacco products that appeal to youth. While we value the precedent set in other jurisdictions, it is important to note that this legislation we're passing aligns with previous legislation found in other jurisdictions. The latter part of the preamble outlines the overlying initiative proposed in the legislation by emphasizing the need to reduce underage smoking by restricting the sale of flavoured tobacco.

Mr. Chair, the preamble's wording serves to further stress the necessity of the provisions proposed in Bill 206 such as section 7.4. Depending on what's being proposed, some legislation may not include any preamble at all. However, in the case of Bill 206 the preamble is necessary and serves as an introduction to the bill's overarching proposals to reduce the occurrence of underage smoking and highlight flavoured tobacco's major role in contributing to youth smoking.

4:10

Next, Mr. Chair, I would like to discuss why it is relevant to amend section 8(2) by striking out “7.2 or 7.3” and substituting “7.2, 7.3, or 7.4.” Section 8(2) is the provision that outlines the punishments for individuals who break the law the first, second, or subsequent times. This section must be amended to include section 7.4 in order to apply the same punitive measures to those who sell flavoured tobacco. It is merely a formality that needs to be incorporated for the sake of consistency. Section 8(2) states that

a person who contravenes section 6, 7, 7.1, 7.2, or 7.3 is guilty of an offence and liable

- (a) for a first offence, to a fine of not more than \$10 000, and
- (b) for a 2nd or subsequent offence, to a fine of not more than \$100 000.

Again, it's important to amend section 8(2) by adding 7.4 after 7.3, being the new provision that deals with prohibiting the sale of flavoured tobacco, in order to explicitly outline the monetary consequences of breaking this law.

Mr. Chair, I firmly believe that Bill 206 will have a tremendous effect on our government's commitment to reducing and, hopefully, eradicating the rate of youth smoking here in Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. Forsyth: I thought it was the Official Opposition first.

The Chair: Hon. member, your House leader indicated that that was the way to go.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on this amendment, the reason being, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, that I have, in fact, a subamendment that I would like to distribute and include on this particular amendment. So if I could just pass the original on.

The Chair: Hon. member, you are proposing a subamendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, sir.

The Chair: Okay. We'll label that subamendment SA1 for the record. Would you please have that distributed? We'll pause for a moment, and I'll come back to you.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

The Chair: Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, we are, in general, very appreciative of this bill and thank you very much for bringing it forward. We also are appreciative of the amendment that was brought forward just now. Parliamentary Counsel very kindly synthesized your amendment and my amendment and came out with these three other provisions that I think will help to finish the deal on this bill. This would be a great example of co-operation in the House, where we are doing this together and creating something that can categorically change the way this flavoured tobacco is marketed here in the province of Alberta and reduce the incidence of smoking and the incidence of young people taking it up and becoming addicted to smoking as well.

I'm going to go backwards through my amendments a little bit here because subsection (5), I think, is a very important issue, and that is talking about menthol. Menthol is a flavouring of tobacco. There are no two ways about it. It's impossible to differentiate between menthol, let's say, or cherry or any other flavours that are put into tobacco products. As I did research on this, Mr. Chair, I found out that the infusion of menthol into cigarettes is much more insidious than just a marketing ploy or a way by which they try to entice nonsmokers to smoking by adding flavour, candy flavour or whatever.

In fact, there is a medical thing that menthol actually does, which is to open the lung passages to increase the interaction of the smoke, including the nicotine, into the bloodstream. So you're literally adding an agent that makes cigarettes more addictive.

Even further to that, Mr. Chairman – this is all quite a revelation to me; I'm sure it is to many of you as well – elements of menthol are put into almost all cigarettes at different levels to increase this expansion phenomenon, which, as I say, increases the nicotine absorption into the bloodstream and makes the cigarettes more addictive.

So, really, that's what we are aiming at here in the first place, to somehow restrict people's first use of cigarettes and to decrease the addictive components of this practice. Menthol – very interesting – is not just a flavour to make it seem like you're having some sort of candy or food product but is actually a chemical that increases the addictiveness of cigarettes. That, I think, is well worth being a part of Bill 206, and I'm just so happy to be part of this co-operative process by which we can do this.

The other sections of my subamendment, Mr. Chairman, are regarding the prohibition on sales of tobacco products. I really believe that the ability to exempt a class of cigarettes could result in a huge unintended exemption, which underlines the purpose of this act, in general. So with my other two subsections,

(3) The authorization of a flavoured tobacco product by regulation must be made on an individual basis rather than by class, [and]

(4) No person shall advertise or promote the characterizing flavours of a flavoured tobacco product,

I guess we really want to make sure that we are limiting the advertising potential of the cigarettes to be sort of placed in the marketplace, in the shop, as it were, and keep all the tobacco products in one place, behind the counter, behind the walls that we have already legislated here in this House. I see in my constituency, on an anecdotal basis, lots of sales of individual cigarillos and flavourless tobacco and so forth, and it's being sold almost as a different product in a much different way than regular packets of cigarettes are regulated to be sold.

So, Mr. Chair, I really believe that, globally, Bill 206 is a great step in the right direction, and I applaud everyone for doing this. With one part of the amendment which we just saw this afternoon coming from the government side coupled with my subamendments here, we will build something that we can all be proud of and actually reduce smoking rates, increase health outcomes, and put money back in the pockets of people who otherwise would spend it on tobacco.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other speakers? Speaking to the subamendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the hon. member. First off, I want to thank him for his proposed amendments here. One question I do have for him, though, is if he could please give a definition of exactly what he believes "made on an individual basis rather than by class" to be and specifically "by class." I'm not sure I understand.

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. I think what we're trying to get around here is that we can pick off new products that might be brought out. Obviously, this is a very insidious thing. It's a moving target, and the marketers of tobacco products will shift into new areas and new types of products. I believe this is looking to mitigate against that, to have an open-ended part of perhaps new products that might come out that might not be covered by a class definition of the tobacco products in our regulations.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 206 as well as the amendment, Bill 206 being the flavoured tobacco reduction act. The bill, very simply, will prohibit the sale of tobacco products and flavouring agents that are listed in the regulations. This is very broad language, something which I'll speak about in a moment.

Let's look at why this bill is being proposed in the Legislature. Advocates of this bill argue a number of points. We all know them: youth are subjected to irresistible advertising schemes of tobacco companies; flavoured tobacco is destroying the health of our youth; tobacco use is bad; therefore, we must protect our children from such harm.

There are a number of other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world which have established prohibitions on flavoured tobacco products. For example, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick have all passed legislation prohibiting flavoured tobacco products from being sold. But here's the interesting thing. None of these provinces – Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick – have allowed these laws to come into force. The reason is because the federal government passed and enacted in 2009 a ban on flavoured tobacco products which is much more effective and targeted than any of the laws these provinces were going to enact.

Now, we hear that youth in Alberta are getting their hands on flavoured tobacco products. I'm curious to know exactly how these youth are getting their hands on the tobacco. Maybe there are MLAs here who know that in Alberta there's no provincial penalty for a retail store selling tobacco to someone underage. Maybe there are MLAs here who know that there isn't even a minimum age in Alberta for purchasing tobacco. Maybe there are MLAs here who know that the federal government does not put a lot of resources into enforcing the federal provisions prohibiting youth access to tobacco.

An example. Let's say that there's a kid who is walking home from school, and he makes a detour to go buy some flavoured tobacco products. He walks into his home, and his mother sees him with these flavoured tobacco products. She asks him: where did you get that? If he says, "From the corner store," under Alberta law there's basically nothing she can do to hold the retailer accountable. That is a shame, that is a problem, and that is what we as legislators should address.

I am fully aware that Alberta has a possession law, where no one under the age of 18 can possess tobacco. Let's examine that law for a moment. While other Canadian provinces are aware of the issue of youth tobacco consumption, they have typically instituted a minimum age for purchasing, not a minimum age for possession. Under current Alberta law police officers can search a youth and, if they find tobacco, can charge that youth with a possession offence, for which they will likely pay a fine.

What if the PCs really cared about the root problem of youth tobacco consumption, youth access to tobacco? This bill today would include a minimum age for purchasing tobacco. This puts the pressure on retailers. This targets them, not kids.

There is a lack of enforcement federally on tobacco consumption among youth, and if the province wants to do something about it . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

Mr. Saskiw: I'll refer to the amendment in a second if you want.

Point of Order Relevance

Dr. Brown: We're talking about the subamendment, if I'm not mistaken, at this juncture, are we not?

The Chair: Yes, we're on the subamendment. So you're suggesting relevance, hon. member?

Dr. Brown: Well, I would ask him if he's speaking to the subamendment.

The Chair: Okay. Hon. member, to the subamendment.

Mr. Saskiw: Yes, I'm speaking to the subamendment.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Saskiw: There's a lack of enforcement federally on tobacco consumption among youth, and if the province wants to do something about it, we need real action, not a bad law, to fill the gap on youth access to tobacco. We need real laws that target tobacco retailers, who currently don't have anything to fear from the provincial government if they sell to youth. I know that there's a lot of criticism of the federal ban on flavoured tobacco products due to the ease with which the tobacco industry bypass the prohibitions with small changes to their product lines. I'm sure the federal government is well aware of these problems and is addressing them in short order. The purpose of their bill has been circumvented in some cases, and they will find a remedy for it. It is not our job, however, to pass a bad law to try to fill the gap. These subamendments, in particular, don't do anything further in that regard.

We need to recognize that the federal government has already established its capacity to legislate in this area. Why is this government not interested in actually trying to fix the problem of youth access to tobacco? Why is this government more concerned with putting a poorly fitting Band-Aid solution on the problem? I'm opposed to children having access to things they shouldn't have, things like alcohol, drugs, vehicles, tobacco, firearms, unsupervised use of prescription medication, and so on. This law attempts to totally ban flavoured tobacco in Alberta and keep it out of the hands of kids, when the real problem is actually youth access. None of these subamendments actually deal with that. We need to know how they are getting their hands on the tobacco now.

Now, there are other jurisdictions which take a different approach and ban all flavoured tobacco products except those listed in regulations, usually menthol and mint products. Again, the technique used to identify these products is the characterizing flavours. I think that was an amendment that the hon. member had put forward, and we were happy to see that.

Let's look at the practical side of things. What kind of consumption of flavoured tobacco is there in Alberta among youth? Let's remember that youth are not typically wealthy, so cheaper products are more appealing. This is the very reason why the federal government prohibits the sale of small or single flavoured tobacco products. It is way cheaper to buy one of those than it is a full pack of cigars or a tin of chew. How many kids are out there consuming flavoured tobacco today? We need to know

the demographics. We need to know if there is a difference between different forms of tobacco consumption without assuming all forms should be treated equally. These are questions that need to be answered, and I hope that the subsequent subamendments will deal with those.

Something else we should look at in amendments is the weight factor. Any tobacco product that includes a larger mass of tobacco is going to be expensive. This bill, for example, would prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco sold in bulk weight. There aren't many kids, to my knowledge, purchasing bulk tobacco products. They don't typically operate that way. Usually, it's a small cigar or snub-type cigarillo. It's cheap. If we were to ban flavoured tobacco products to keep them out of the hands of kids, why don't we include a weight factor in this bill?

While this government claims to be open and progressive, there's a virtual vacuum of cultural sensitivity in these amendments. How often has one government or another created a law without first contemplating the implications for cultural and religious groups. Tobacco use, even flavoured tobacco use, is widespread amongst many cultures and religions, especially among the cultural and religious practices of First Nations and Métis in Alberta. My constituency has a significant number of First Nations and Métis people, and many are very concerned with the government's lack of consultation and care.

Canada is supposed to be inclusive and a safe environment for all, but this government is creating a precedent for making snap decisions on culturally significant issues. I do not see these addressed in the subamendments. Has the government even considered how they will respond to the many immigrant groups and cultural groups in Alberta who use tobacco products as part of their traditional activities? This is just another example of poor planning and irresponsibly meagre cultural awareness.

There are many products adults choose to consume or use every day. Things like alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and vehicles are used responsibly by adults every day. They make choices about how and what they specifically want to consume: a beer or a vodka, a cigar or a cigarette, a rifle or a shotgun, a car or an SUV. Adults who are rational, responsible, intelligent human beings don't for the most part give any of these items to their kids because they know that would probably cause their kids harm. Does it happen once in a while? I'm sure it does. Does it happen with some things more than others? I'm sure it does. Are we also contemplating bans on flavoured alcohol or a ban on brightly coloured firearms or a ban on colourful compact cars? Are kids more attracted to these items than others? Maybe.

There is absolutely no reason why we can't fix the real problem of youth access to things which are dangerous for them to have in their possession. The measures in Bill 206 and these amendments are irresponsible and offensive to the freedom and personal responsibility that we as adult Albertans enjoy in every other capacity of life. We can make these changes without going too far. Going too far, in my opinion, is irresponsible. This government is here to protect the vulnerable and to protect the general health and welfare of the people of Alberta. This government is not here, in my opinion, to dictate to responsible adults what they can and cannot consume simply because this government is either incapable or unwilling to fix the fundamental problems with this legal and regulatory framework when it comes to youth access to flavoured tobacco products.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wanted to raise just a couple of points on this subamendment. I wanted to thank the Member for Edmonton-Calder for this amendment. For a couple of reasons I'm not going to be supporting it. It talks about under subsection (3) "the authorization of a flavoured tobacco product by regulation." Again, that seems to go against the actual intent of the bill, and that's to create a regulatory framework.

One of the comments that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills had just made was that the federal law was largely ineffective. Why? Because the industry was able to just provide minor tweaks to their product labels, and that is exactly what this framework would ward against. We'd be creating a regulation so that we could respond to that in the event that that does happen in the sale of these products in Alberta.

Subsection (4), to me, seems to be a little bit redundant, saying that "no person shall advertise or promote the characterizing flavours of a . . . tobacco product." Well, Mr. Chair, if we're getting rid of flavours, I guess there's nothing to advertise or promote.

Subsection (5), dealing with menthol: I think, again, that can be dealt with by regulation.

With no disrespect to the Member for Edmonton-Calder, I think it would be in the best interests of this private member's bill to vote this particular subamendment down.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to the subamendment. First of all, on section (3) I'd ask the Member for Edmonton-Calder: by making it an individual regulatory change that is required to mandate, you know, an individual decision on authorization of flavoured tobacco, would that not in fact entail a more cumbersome process because regulations, of course, have to be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council? It would seem to me much more preferable to have a blanket prohibition in general on the flavoured tobacco products by class rather than having to make an individual decision on each of them and requiring a separate regulatory imposition by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Secondly, on subsection (4), as the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has just alluded to, I cannot see why we would need a prohibition on advertising and promoting, you know, the flavours of a flavoured tobacco product if you cannot sell it. I mean, who would want to advertise something that is prohibited? It would seem to me completely counterproductive and redundant.

The Chair: Thank you.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. A privilege to speak to this subamendment to the bill prohibiting flavoured tobacco products.

The Chair: Are you speaking to the subamendment, hon. member?

Dr. Swann: To subamendment SA1.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: The subamendment would, I think, make our job a lot easier in terms of identifying individual elements that may not be even created yet and prove to be another attraction. It's very clear that flavourings and aromas are hugely attractive for young

people. Colourings, flavourings, aromas have increased the number of young people using tobacco in all forms. This subamendment, I think, would make the job easier in terms of not having to go back and deal with some new chemical that has been identified as a new flavouring, a new aroma, or a new colouring that creates more attraction.

Quite apart from trying to anticipate every possible variation, this subamendment would make it easier to enforce what we're trying to enforce, which is no flavourings, no additives, no colourings, no making these more attractive than the tobacco itself is. Therefore, it definitely should include menthol. There's no question that menthol is the primary ingredient that is helping young people and older people maintain the addiction. It's identified as a very clear contributor to the uptake and the maintenance of tobacco use.

We will be supporting the subamendment, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to subamendment SA1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to say a few words about this. Having never been a smoker but having watched people really suffer when they have been trying to quit, it's something that really touches my heart in terms of those poor people out there who want to stop smoking and are having trouble.

This bill was actually addressed to our young people. This was really for our young people. It really is an important bill. In terms of this subamendment I think the thoughts towards it are good. I think that his intentions are very good when it comes to (3), that "the authorization . . . must be made on an individual basis," but it actually adds to the government's workload and becomes very cumbersome. Everybody who has the newest flavour will then be approaching the government: please, please, please let ours through. It would be sort of a never-ending thing coming at us, essentially just wasting time. We really do want to stop those flavoured products getting out to our young people, so I think that (3) is well meaning but cumbersome.

Subsection (4), the advertising: I think it's been covered quite well, that as long as it's something that cannot be sold in Alberta, then banning the advertising doesn't really make any difference.

The last one is one where I'm, again, really conflicted, because there are so many people that I know that are just addicted, just totally addicted. They would love to get off tobacco, and they've tried again and again and again to do that. Of those people, some of them do smoke menthol cigarettes. It's just sort of what they do. We would love to be able to help them to quit cigarettes altogether, but banning the menthol that they smoke won't actually help them to quit smoking, as much as I would very much like to be able to help them.

For these reasons, I think that we should reject this subamendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been attempting to sort of look at this subamendment and the amendment and the initial act and the initial proposal, which amends other amendments, and it's been confusing to me.

This is what our subamendment is attempting to do. It's doing three things. First of all, there is a provision in the bill as it currently exists which gives the government the ability to exempt from the prohibition, which would be included in the general regulation authorized under this act. As it's currently written, what

could happen is that lobbyists, of which we know there are many, many, many . . .

Dr. Swann: Twenty-four.

Ms Notley: There are at least 24 lobbyists.

. . . could approach the government and say: you know, we know you've got this regulation prohibiting flavoured tobacco, but we'd like you to exempt our particular type of flavoured tobacco from the prohibition.

What this amendment would do is that it would say, if for some reason the government capitulates to any one of these 24 lobbyists, that they do not exempt the tobacco as a class, that they simply exempt it as one individual type, the point being to limit the opportunity for exemptions on the prohibition to be applied going forward. That's really important because as I've said, there are a whole bunch of folks making a lot of money doing nothing but lobbying this government all the time. That's what this is designed to do, to limit the opportunity for exemptions to the prohibition on the sale of flavoured tobacco products. That's what number one is.

4:40

Now, number two, the reason that we're putting in this section saying, "No person shall advertise or promote the characterizing flavours of a flavoured tobacco product" is because, the way that this bill is currently written, with its current enabling legislation, it is absolutely foreseeable that some flavoured products will still be allowed to be sold while other flavoured products will be banned. What this amendment attempts to do is that if at some point the government decides to succumb to one of the 24 lobbyists out there and allow for a certain subset of flavoured tobacco to be exempt from the prohibition on sale, no matter what no one should ever be able to advertise this flavoured product. So that's what we're getting to with subset 2 of this amendment. That's the point that we're trying to achieve there.

Then, of course, the third thing, as has been discussed in some detail, is that, notwithstanding the rationale or lack thereof of the most recent member speaking, menthol should be banned, full stop, the end, just like other flavoured tobaccos, because it also appeals more to youth, and it also enhances the opportunity for the additive chemicals to make it into the bloodstream and to achieve the purpose for which it is designed, which is to enhance addiction.

I speak from much personal experience, having been a pack-a-day smoker for 17 years of my life, starting at 16 with – you guessed it – menthol cigarettes. As much as I still crave cigarettes now, even 15 years after having quit, I will say that I never crave menthol. But that is, nonetheless, how I got into it in the first place, and that's what it was designed to do.

Anyway, the point is that all three components of this subamendment are designed to (a) limit the opportunity for exemptions to the prohibition on flavoured products, (b) to ensure that, notwithstanding any exemptions, advertisement is banned in all cases, and (c) to ensure that menthol in particular is subject to the prohibition on the sale of flavoured products.

That is what we are attempting to do. It is an attempt to strengthen the bill. It is an attempt to tighten to linkage between this bill and the stated objective of this bill, which is to limit the sale and purchase of flavoured products in the province of Alberta because we know that it is one of the singularly most effective ways to get young people to smoke. Given that we have amongst the highest numbers of young smokers in Alberta and we have fewer prohibition mechanisms in place than other provinces and

we are not meeting our goals in terms of reducing the number of teenagers who are smoking, that is why I think we can all agree that the objective is a good one. But that objective will be met most effectively by folks on the other side accepting this subamendment, all done in good faith in an attempt to make this act work as effectively as possible.

I hope that explanation clears up some of the confusion that was laid out by a couple of the members opposite, including the current Solicitor General. It read a little bit confusingly, but that's what the actual outcome of this subamendment is.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others?

Seeing none, we'll call the question on subamendment SA1.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We'll go back to amendment A1. Speaking on amendment A1, the hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Chair, just some very brief comments in response to amendment A1 to Bill 206. First of all, I would like to join others in commending the hon. member sponsoring the bill and the members that preceded her. In the case of this amendment, I think it can best be described as a refinement of something that I think people on all sides of the House had expressed support for when this bill was debated previously, that being an opportunity to establish and maintain a strong regulatory framework to restrict the sale of flavoured tobacco.

As the hon. member who spoke earlier indicated, Mr. Chair, the term "characterizing flavour" presents an opportunity to really close a loophole in what might otherwise be available if, in fact, the bill were to be passed with the original restrictions based on the term "flavoured tobacco." "Characterizing flavour," Mr. Chair, gives us an opportunity to be ahead of the marketplace as new products are developed and marketed, to be able to be responsive to changes in nomenclature that manufacturers might envision in order to get around this bill should it be passed, really to lead the country, if I can say, in the most aggressive legislation possible to identify and to target products as they come to market or, ideally, before they come to market, and to have an impact before those decisions are made by companies and prevent even the most initial exposure of youth across the province to these products, which are very dangerous and which are very enticing, as has been described earlier.

Mr. Chair, that is the intent of the amendment, as has been mentioned, and I certainly support it. It's to strengthen the bill. It is to provide a greater degree of flexibility in the application of the regulatory framework that would be established under Bill 206. I think we've heard a lot of support from all sides of the House for being as aggressive as we possibly can be, and I would urge all members of the House to support amendment A1.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there others? The Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to ask the mover of this amendment, the Member for Calgary-Currie, why they wouldn't be doing menthol in it. I'm just going over some statistics from the U.S. that show that that's the highest thing that comes across and the fact that they didn't ban the menthol either, I guess. If we're going to lead the way on it, why wouldn't the bill on this talk about menthol?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to respond.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you very much for the question. While we know that there are statistics that would show the detriment of menthol cigarettes and the enticement that they project out there to our young people, at this point we feel that we can best attend to and deal with this part of the problem through regulations, so that would be the answer there.

The Chair: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I have to emphasize the same point. We've got 3,400 people dying every year in this province from tobacco. They start, many of them, as children. Menthol is a part of the reason they start, and the fact that you're not including that is a serious, I think, omission, either by accident or deliberately. Having looked at the website for the lobbyists' registry and seeing 24 lobbyists who have met with this government over the last couple of months, I believe that part of the reason it's being exempted is because of the lobbyists, and that's a shame, really.

This government is putting itself forward as wanting to be serious about reducing tobacco uptake in children. That has to include menthol. Thirty-eight per cent of young people use mentholated, menthol-flavoured tobacco products. We have something like 40,000 youth and children using tobacco products in this province. This is a set-up for a huge health care problem in the future, and if we're really serious about this, I hope you'll reconsider this and make very specific, very explicit the commitment to menthol.

I've no problem with the rest of these amendments that you've included here, but without menthol you are weakening this bill to the point where you are, in essence, kowtowing to the industry. People like Hal Danchilla, a long-time Tory who has been lobbying this government on many different things and has been included in your lobbyists' registry and is now lobbying probably in relation to potential lost revenue by tobacco companies who sell mentholated products, are the big winners here. I hope you're going to take this seriously and accept an amendment in relation specifically to menthol.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Cusanelli: I want to thank the member from across the way for his comments, and I think I would add to that, you know, my belief. When we are introducing these amendments here, section 7.4(1)(a) is specifically talking about characterizing flavour. It is my belief that there is definitely an appetite to have a look at all of the flavours, and in my view, if we are looking at, specifically, menthol or adding it into a list, we're going to have to have a list that includes everything on it in order for people not to find a loophole to get around it.

In my view, again, if we are talking about flavoured tobacco products that have characterizing flavours, my belief is that those will include mint, wintergreen, et cetera. Thank you.

4:50

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. I noticed that you, again, exempted the term "menthol." Was that deliberate, or are you actually serious about trying to make sure menthol is in the regulations or

whatever? There's no guarantee that menthol will be included if the lobbyists are successful.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to offer some general comments to this particular amendment. I am going to be supporting this bill. I wanted to just get into a few of the issues that have been raised today. The whole issue of flavoured tobacco came to me in 2009, when I carried a similar bill. Unfortunately, it didn't get to see the light of day because it was low on the actual list.

This bill, Mr. Chair, is not about restricting adult choice. I was actually visited today by three medical students, who talked to me about this and indicated to me that the average age that children start, when they start chewing tobacco, is 10 years old, and it's 16 when they smoke. Of course, the legal age is 18. There's no legal capacity for an individual, even now under the current framework, to purchase these products.

The intent is to prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco products in our province in order to reduce the rates of youth smoking. I'll give you an example. Section 7.4 of the bill: "No person shall sell or offer to sell a tobacco product that contains a flavouring agent prohibited by the regulations." This does not contain any criminal element, which is clearly in the federal purview.

As well, no person shall sell or offer to sell a tobacco product that contains a characterizing flavour prohibited by the regulations. That's something that the Minister of Health has talked about here, that this creates a regulatory framework. So if, for example, "wintergreen" then becomes "spearmint green" or then becomes "greener green," we need that regulatory framework so that we can make a quick decision on these particular items. Mr. Chair, as I mentioned, the marketing of these products can be creative, and that's why we need this regulatory framework.

Mr. Chair, I am a lifelong nonsmoker, nonchewer, never consumed any tobacco, but I also have had many friends and some people in my family who have had much difficulty trying to quit. I can imagine that when some of these individuals . . . [interjection] I'm not so sure what they're heckling over here, what I'm hearing these days. Maybe he wants to push some tobacco at me – I'm not quite sure – but no; thank you. As an asthmatic I'm going to pass, thank you, Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Of course, a lot of people these days will talk about demonization of businesses. Well, Mr. Chair, we don't want to demonize any business here. In fact, the directors of any company, whether public or private, whether tobacco or any other company, have a fiduciary duty, rather the highest duty at law, to generate the highest amount of profit for their shareholders. That's their duty. But the check on this is when the government can step in and when we see something happening that is not quite right, and that's what flavoured tobacco presents to me today.

Let me just ask you this, Mr. Chair. Appletini: is that a flavour that appeals to an adult? Bubble gum: is that marketed at someone like me, who is 38 years old? Probably not. Cotton candy: is that marketed at someone like the Minister of Health, who is a couple of years older than me? Is that marketed at him? None of this is marketed at adults. This is being marketed at children, and we have the highest duty owed to anyone to protect those who have no legal capacity to choose, those who cannot help themselves.

Mr. Chair, I will conclude my remarks there.

The Chair: Hon. members, I hate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(6) at 4:55 p.m. the chair shall interrupt the committee and immediately rise and report without the question being put.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, it is three minutes to 5. I'm wondering if you would seek a motion for the House to call it 5 o'clock, that we would move to the next order of business. I'm just wondering.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we call it 5 o'clock, and we can proceed with the motion that's on your Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Capital Region River Valley Park

514. Mr. Xiao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton to implement its ribbon of green concept plan, which would connect all of the river valley parks into a single, continuous, protected park.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 514. I'm proposing this motion because I believe that the creation of a world-class river valley park would further boost our already thriving tourism industry in our beautiful province. When one thinks of a world-class, cosmopolitan city, one often thinks of the many attractions a specific place has to offer, those unique sights that differentiate it from other cities.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, New York City, as we all know, is home to the beautiful outdoor oasis known as Central Park, where millions visit year after year to admire and take advantage of one of the world's most famous examples of a green urban space. You know, every time I was in New York, I tried to spare a few hours to enjoy the sights and sounds in that beautiful park. In Paris the Luxembourg Gardens are renowned for their impeccable landscaping and magnificent array of flora, that is surrounded by an assortment of even more impressive modern and classic art pieces. If a city's infrastructure represents a skeleton, one could say that the parks are representative of its heart, helping to bring life to those who inhabit it.

With Motion 514 I urge the government to continue its support in the creation of an innovative capital region river valley park. The government's continued support of this green initiative would promote and foster a collaborative environment and establish a shared sense of pride between the capital region and the surrounding municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's tourism sector is a fruitful and a dynamic industry that generates over \$7.8 billion annually in total visitor spending. Moreover, \$1.15 billion in tax revenues is generated and infused into our economy, which helps our province employ approximately 139,000 dedicated individuals. Every year millions of tourists visit our province, and who can blame them? In fact, in 2011 over 35 million tourists travelled to Alberta. It is common to hear a multitude of different languages – German, Chinese, French, Spanish, Punjabi, Hindi, Korean, just to name a few – when visiting one of our many stunning provincial parks. Visitors come here to experience an inspiring landscape that is rich with towering mountains, vibrant prairie fields, and crystal clear, gorgeous, blue waters, something that we and millions of Albertans are blessed enough to enjoy with just a few hours' drive.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Motion 514 does not only urge the government to continue implementing such visionary plans but to build on our province's strong tourism sector. Again, I believe supporting the ongoing efforts to create a widely recognizable capital region river valley park is another facet that would help increase the province's already world-renowned profile as a first-rate and dynamic tourist destination.

Not many people know that Edmonton's North Saskatchewan River valley is the largest stretch of urban parkland in North America. The river valley measures an impressive 7,400 hectares and encompasses 22 major parks and over 150 kilometres of trails, which can be enjoyed by Albertans of all ages looking to take in majestic forest landscapes in a metropolitan city.

In 1996 the River Valley Alliance was formed by seven municipalities bordering the capital region's North Saskatchewan River. These municipalities included the town of Devon, Parkland county, Leduc county, Edmonton, Strathcona county, Sturgeon county, and the city of Fort Saskatchewan. In 2008, seeking feedback for this vision, the River Valley Alliance conducted widespread consultations with the public and various key stakeholders. The alliance did this in order to seek out all of the necessary voices that would ensure the creation of a unique park that would be accessible and speak to all Albertans. Shortly after consultations ended, Mr. Speaker, the River Valley Alliance released its plan of action, giving readers background information on the river valley as well as presenting their vision of a unique park.

Mr. Speaker, one of the underlying intentions of Motion 514 is to promote a green space that can be enjoyed by future generations in our province and from around the world. Additionally, by supporting the River Valley Alliance's efforts, our most treasured wildlife can continue to inhabit the many hectares of vegetation and the wetlands that they all call home. In addition to land preservation, parks have a very positive impact on the health and wellness of individuals since urban parks are more easily accessible to those looking to experience the splendour of the outdoors without having to travel too far. Parks also strengthen community spirit by providing an engaging outdoor space that individuals of all ages and all socioeconomic backgrounds can enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the benefits that a world-class capital region river valley park would provide to our people. Our government recognized the importance of this initiative and contributed \$50 million to help implement the first phase in 2008 along with an additional \$30 million contribution by the government of Canada. In November 2012 the River Valley Alliance began a \$90 million capital project, with our government contributing a further \$30 million. Thirty million dollars also came from the federal government's building Canada fund, with another \$30 million from the participating six municipalities.

This is truly a testament of how much our government believes in the vision of creating a strong natural space while recognizing the potential economic and health benefits that result with this implementation. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I am proposing Motion 514. I believe that this initiative promotes a strong intergovernmental and collaborative approach which will allow future generations to enjoy a natural space that has been matured and maintained by those who came before them.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all hon. members in this House to take great interest in this debate and consider fully the advantages of this initiative proposed by Motion 514. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to say a few words on the motion presented by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. [interjection] I am hoping that I won't put others to sleep while I make this presentation.

I just want to comment that this is a visionary project brought forward by the member. It's been in play for quite some time, since 1990. The formal plan was brought forward in 1992 in the Edmonton area. It was a capital project, and I have some concerns that capital projects, then, require operating capital to continue. Nevertheless, it's a visionary project that needs to be brought forward and discussed in this Assembly. The project preserves Edmonton's nature in the river valley, and as a farmer I take great pride in that. With our ongoing concerns regarding the environment and the future of our communities, it's significant that these types of projects be brought forward.

To that end, I do have some concerns with the jurisdictions involving the riparian areas that are being brought forward. I've seen a map of the potential development of the area. There may be concerns, not unlike what was exhibited this summer, in floodway areas. So I wish to bring awareness of that forward to the Assembly.

River valley access has been controversial, in my understanding, in the Edmonton area. The project was postponed as a result of a gondola being suggested from Jasper Avenue to the river's edge. Now, that may be controversial, and it may be an obstacle that could or could not be overcome by the development. That may only allude to the ongoing operational costs that may follow a significant investment. Some citizens may believe that their money may be spent better with priorities of infrastructure, being sidewalks and roads. That alludes to some of the controversy that comes forward with these types of things.

The concerns, reverting back to the riparian areas and the floodway issues, potentially are of concern to myself because of the potential for significant investments. Like, they talk about boat launches and docks. Some of those may be in areas that could at some unforeseen time be subject to flooding or damage, which would be a negative to that. I'd simply like to express my concerns about ongoing operation costs and see that this is brought forward to the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since becoming an MLA, I've had the opportunity to spend a lot more time in Edmonton than I used to. I think that the ribbon of green project is truly unique, and I wish the city the best in continuing this project. This project preserves nature in Edmonton's river valley system. It's a point of pride for Edmontonians that crosses all political lines. As a temporary resident of this city, seeing all of the greenery is always a welcome sight.

Municipalities should be empowered to spend money allotted to them as they please, which is happening with this particular project. The province should always be a willing and supportive partner to municipalities. If a community can identify what is needed or wanted, they should be given the flexibility to do so. Of course, infrastructure money should always first be directed to core infrastructure and operating services that a community would have.

5:10

I would also like to use this time to express my support for a policy change related to the motion made by the hon. member. The Wildrose 10-10 plan would give 10 per cent of provincial revenue directly to municipalities. With budget surpluses, another 10 per cent of each surplus would also be given to the towns, the cities, and the counties. The people on the ground making local decisions know better than the province does when it comes to prioritizing their own community needs, and our 10-10 plan reflects that very viewpoint. I would encourage the member's next motion to be one that supports all worthwhile municipal undertakings by simply supporting the Wildrose 10-10 plan. A little plug there, a big plug.

Assuming this is a project that Edmontonians still want to see, I will support this motion in the hopes that municipalities continue to receive the funding and flexibility they should. We all know the value of beautifying a city, because it beautifies our lives in general. Green spaces are an asset to any community, and the river valley as it currently exists is beautiful. There's no question. It's one of the best in the province. Seeing it made even better: you can't help but support that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Motion 514, the goal of which is to support the River Valley Alliance and continued implementation of the ribbon of green concept plan. Ultimately, the aim is to create a world-class capital region river valley park. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing forward this motion to the House today. In fact, the constituency of Edmonton-McClung is a short canoe ride, a single-track bike ride, or an enjoyable hike along the river valley away from my own. I admire his unwavering dedication to promoting this government commitment to establishing a world-class capital region river valley park.

The river valley in the capital region essentially follows a patchwork of bike trails, parks, bridges, off-leash areas, horse trails, picnic areas. There's a rowing club, a zoo, and an abundance of wildlife that make up the area as part of the Trans Canada Trail. This plan would connect all the river valley parks into a single, continuous protected park. Promoting ongoing efforts to create an integrated river valley park would help raise the capital region's global profile as another large urban park that has done so much in cities such as Vancouver and New York.

Also, there are several benefits attached to helping create green outdoor spaces such as increased exercise, increased tourism, and the preservation of wildlife habitat. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the River Valley Alliance plan for action highlights a number of these benefits. These range from the social to the economic to the environmental. Even better, these benefits that accrue from the plan fall in line with this government's initiative in tourism and in supporting families and communities.

Mr. Speaker, we heard earlier that the River Valley Alliance, or the RVA, was initiated by Mayor Bill Smith and formed in 1996 by seven municipalities bordering the capital region's North Saskatchewan River: the town of Devon, Parkland county, Leduc county, the city of Edmonton, Strathcona county, Sturgeon county, and Fort Saskatchewan. The RVA was incorporated as a not-for-profit company under part 9 of the Companies Act of Alberta on March 5 of 2003 and released its conceptual plan of action in 2008 after extensive public and stakeholder consultations. It has raised more than \$80 million to implement

this first initiative within the plan. Of that, \$50 million is from the Alberta government and \$30 million from the government of Canada. This will be supplemented by \$30 million of funding from shareholder municipalities. Some projects were completed by 2012, with an additional \$90 million allocated to 2012 to 2016 capital projects.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2012 the River Valley Alliance began a \$90 million capital project that will improve public access to the North Saskatchewan River at the river valley and add new trail features to existing infrastructure in what is North America's longest metropolitan park system. The capital project's 13 initiatives will add a total of 74 kilometres of new recreational trails across six municipalities, six docks or boat launches, and a new Edmonton footbridge, among others. The RVA's plan would contribute greatly to affirming the capital region's status as truly world-class.

The river valley is potentially one of the region's greatest assets, particularly in terms of attracting tourists to the area. Cities with large, well-maintained, and well-equipped parks invariably mark themselves as a tourist destination. If someone is going to Vancouver, Stanley Park is a must-see. In New York it's Central Park; in London it's Hyde Park. Well, I'm telling you right now that you haven't seen anything until you've been to the river valley and experienced the capital region. There are similar sentiments for many other cities with notable parks. I think the wonders that a park system can do for attracting visitors and developing a good reputation speak for themselves.

Besides encouraging people to visit Alberta's capital region, residents of the seven municipalities made frequent use of these facilities, made memories, and enjoyed on a daily basis the beautiful scenery the river valley has to offer. Whether this is on the valley's numerous running trails or walking paths, you'll often see neighbours, friends, and people going for lunchtime walks.

The suggestion of cutting tourism funding is not the vision we need. This government, the one Albertans elected to build Alberta, supports growing the tourism industry of this province. This motion reflects the recognition of this need and is in line with the government's plan to strengthen Alberta's tourism.

Again, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to seeing you on the trail.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Sherwood Park.

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I, too, would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing this forward and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for that passionate speech backing the suggestions.

You know, I think we all know and appreciate the world-class river valley that we have to celebrate here in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, when my wife and I first started spending time here after the election and were looking for a place to stay, one of our discussions as we drove around Edmonton was: let's, obviously, try and get close to the Legislature, but let's try to appreciate all the beauty the city has to offer with the pathways, with the parks, and along the river. She suggested I bring a tent, and I said: that's probably not a bad idea, but I'll look for a condo instead. I'm kidding, and of course it didn't – I'm kind of used to that when you don't have much attention or attention span, for that matter.

I think whatever community you're in will celebrate a good pathway system and have a commitment to it. I love the fact that

the province and the city of Edmonton have worked collaboratively in the past and are again going in that direction. I think we can all think that wherever we've been, we've probably seen pathways enhance life for families and for communities. I can think of several examples, having been fortunate enough over the years to travel around the country some in my previous occupation.

You know, Victoria: it's well known that the Galloping Goose trail is one that is used by so many people in Victoria and area. Right now, Mr. Speaker, in Chestermere-Rocky View, thanks to some provincial support, we have a wonderful pathway system being put into place that enables members of the community to walk and enjoy the lake in Chestermere and get around and stay healthy. Calgary, well known, obviously: the pathway system and the parks downtown along the Bow. In fact, what many people don't know is that you can access that trail system from as far out as Chestermere. So they're tremendous in building community and getting people out, and I think they should be encouraged and supported.

The member's motion, specifically:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton . . .

Again, on that note, I just am appreciative that the groups are working together.

I'm not sure what the overall cost commitment will be at the end of this. I know there's been some controversy throughout it, and obviously we need to establish what our wants and needs are and make responsible decisions. I think that at some point somebody had suggested – and maybe I'd ask the member for clarity on it – a gondola, I believe, that was not very well supported. I think it was sort of akin to the \$25 million pedestrian bridge in Calgary that received so much controversy when it was built, people suggesting that maybe it was a little excessive and the money might have been better spent elsewhere. So that doesn't seem to be on the table. I'm happy to hear that.

5:20

I think healthy communities are a terrific thing, and we have much to celebrate here in Edmonton. It is a beautiful city. This would only enhance all of what we have to offer. I think that for tourists coming to Edmonton, it's a great chance to get around and see what there is and enjoy it in all of its splendour. I think the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills behind me mentioned the 10-10 plan that we've talked about before from our Wildrose Party, that would see more monies go to municipalities for things like this, so obviously I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that I think that makes perfect sense and that we would love to see that money go to municipalities so they can enhance projects like this. [interjections] I can see that's spurred some debate, and it shouldn't take anything away from the fact, Mr. Speaker, that I stand here in support of what the Member for Edmonton-McClung has brought forward.

I'm just suggesting that going forward, we might look at ways that we can concretely allow communities to plan, long-term planning, so they know what's coming, so they know what money they're going to be getting from the province, and so they can commit that to areas that will enhance tourism, will enhance the city, and will enhance the lives of families and communities. We all want healthier communities.

Again, I thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing it forward, and anything that's better for the city of

Edmonton that's financially responsible we would certainly encourage as a healthier choice. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and participate in debate on Motion 514, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I'd like to commend the hon. member for his unwavering dedication to fostering the growth and development of this province's green spaces, which truly enhances the lives of Alberta's families and communities who enjoy these spaces on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, before I read Motion 514, I'd like to announce my pride in the municipal sustainability funds that we offer to municipalities on an ongoing basis so they can plan for their budgets.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 514 reads:

be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton to implement its ribbon of green concept plan, which would connect all of the river valley parks into a single, continuous, protected park.

The ribbon of green concept plan consists of five basic principles: conservation, recreation, development, trails, and education. We're really striving for a balance. Conceptualized in 1990, the plan aimed to bring Edmonton on par with many other urban centres like Vancouver and New York City, home to Stanley Park and Central Park respectively. The ribbon of green concept plan would extend the urban park to include the entire length of the river valley and ravine system. Further, the plan would divide the park into three land-management zones: preservation, conservation, and extensive use.

Mr. Speaker, the plan represents a balance between making the valley accessible for public use and protecting the natural landscape and wildlife areas. If implemented, the green ribbon would further develop five major parks: Big Island, Terwillegar, Twin Brooks, Buena Vista, and Hermitage. The Terwillegar park area, for example, would be developed into a water-based, nature-oriented park, which would create a natural preserve area and establish the area's viable ecology by using existing and restored resources. This area would link to adjacent neighbourhoods via two pedestrian bridges, encouraging residents to explore and enjoy the natural habitat surrounding them. Finally, the plan proposes a continuous trail system, including the construction of eight river crossing bridges and an eventual link to adjacent municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, not only does this plan connect communities within the capital region municipality, but it will eventually encompass communities outside of that. As a matter of fact, as mayor of Strathcona county I was privileged to be a shareholder on the River Valley Alliance, a very dedicated organization of capital region municipalities that support the ribbon of green plan. This is an initiative that could work to build Alberta's park system to compare with other jurisdictions from around the world. When the ribbon of green plan was first thought of in 1990, five basic principles were chosen to represent the initiatives overall concept. Conservation, recreation, development, trails, and education are all things central to the success of the proposed project.

In regard to conservation the plan would ensure that a major portion of the river valley will remain in a natural state and that certain areas of habitat will be highly protected, ensuring the existence of native vegetation and wildlife communities. In order to balance recreational enjoyment of our outdoors with the

importance of conservation, the plan would ensure that recreation activities are compatible with the protection of existing natural areas and must require the valley's natural setting.

Trails are also essential to the green ribbon concept plan. I know that when one drives along River Valley Road, no matter the season, there are many people running, biking, and enjoying the shared pathways. I do believe I've seen the hon. Member for Riverview out on the trail passing by in the evenings, in the afternoons, and on the weekends.

Another important aspect of this concept is education. Programs will be incorporated into the plan's concept to increase the awareness of natural and human history as well as encourage an environmentally responsible attitude toward the valley and promote respect for other users.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we forget that right here in the capital region there are 97 kilometres of biking, hiking, skiing, walking, and snowshoeing trails that run through the city and along the banks and edges of the North Saskatchewan. In the *National Post's* best of summer in August 2003, Edmonton's river valley was named the longest interlinked recreation area of parkland in North America.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 514 balances respect for the natural habitat while encouraging citizens to partake in and enjoy the pristine river valley right here at our back door. More parks and green space for Albertans to enjoy means an even better quality of life for our active families and communities. In November 2012 our government demonstrated its commitment to the well-being of Albertans, families, and communities when it provided funding to support the River Valley Alliance.

I would again like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing forth this motion. I'll look forward to hearing the rest of the debate, and I encourage my colleagues in this House to participate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this motion, and I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward. I hope that this government would not just make this a promise or just a vision but make it a goal to make this a world-class river valley park system not just on par with something like Central Park but something even better. It has that potential.

Now, I will say that although the town I come from is not part of the capital region plan or anything else, we do come to Edmonton. My family does on a regular basis, and we use the amenities. We use the park system, and we recognize the value. It's not a value just restricted to the capital region. It is an Alberta value, and it can be a Canadian value that is beyond the expectation of what some other cities have done. I think we have the potential to do some great things here.

So I would like to tell the member that not only can I thank him for bringing it forward, but under a Wildrose government, particularly with the 10-10 plan, we would make sure there was stable funding so we could continue the development. The beauty is, as I do know that this government will pass this because the Official Opposition supports it, that a Wildrose government would make sure that this still carries forward into future years, so there will be no interruptions with the development of this world-class park system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Jeneroux: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to stand here and offer resounding support for my colleague from Edmonton-McClung for this particular motion.

I'm blessed to have in my constituency this natural habitat that is the river valley. It follows along the golf course. There are running paths through it. I've yet to see the Member for Edmonton-Riverview run through there, but I'm sure I will at some point.

I think the key thing I wanted to bring up was how this is going to promote green space for future generations. I'd just like to say that I spent a lot of time as a kid living in the Capilano area, which is now in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and going and running through there and biking through the river valley and also spending a lot of time just playing there with my friends. Those are fond memories that I look back on, and I hope that my girls will be able to go and experience the exact same thing that I did. We were able to go and frolic in the water, if you will. [interjections] Yeah. It's bringing back great memories.

Mr. Anderson: Who doesn't like a good frolic?

5:30

Mr. Jeneroux: That's true, hon. Member for Airdrie. Who doesn't like a good frolic?

Then the other point I just wanted to bring up is the support from the community that this particular motion has had. This all came, from my understanding, from when a number of years ago the city of Edmonton got a proposal to build a gravel pit within the area. I believe it's one of the largest petitions this Legislature has ever seen, the amount of support that came from the community to keep this a natural habitat. I often encourage constituents, when they come to me and say, "This is what's happening in our area," to come up with an alternative. Let's not just say no for the sake of no. Let's say: "We're going to do this in the area. We're going to enhance the area like this." This is exactly what this group did, and they should be commended for that. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung – he'll correct me if I'm wrong – was very instrumental in helping them, assisting them through the process to get it here on the Legislature floor.

In a kind of summation of my comments here, Mr. Speaker, I believe we can protect, we can enhance, and we can preserve this Edmonton river valley. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise in support of Motion 514 and thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for bringing it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton to implement its ribbon of green concept plan, which would connect all of the river valley parks into a single, continuous, protected park.

There is absolutely no doubt how gorgeous the river valley is. There's no doubt about the trees and the scenery and the opportunities for recreation that it offers.

Mr. Speaker, I remember in my university years here playing on a very beautiful municipal golf course down there time and time again. It was tons of fun. Of course, I know that golf is close to your heart from a match we played this summer, that I very much enjoyed.

I want to bring it to Medicine Hat, where I live, and Cypress-Medicine Hat, which I represent. Medicine Hat has miles and miles of trails through the entire city. Through our parks, through our coulees, in between our houses we have many, many greenbelts, finger parks they are called, in several different areas. How popular they make our city; how much they get used. I live close to one, and when I have a chance to walk my dog down there or go through there, there are always countless people using the parks, communicating, socializing, getting exercise, the very things that so much of our society nowadays seems to lack.

In conjunction with what some of the other members of the Assembly have said, how other significant cities have significant attractions like Central Park or Stanley Park in Vancouver, the river valley park here is as gorgeous as it can be. That, coupled with this kind of thing, could make it all the more accessible for all of us, and I rise in support for that reason.

I also, though, resoundingly support what the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills said about our 10-10 plan and the extra flexibility that it will give to all municipalities to put the money where they want, the amount of money that they'll save not having to be shovel ready, not having to fill out application forms and engineering forms and have these extensive people on the payroll, just hoping that they can get some money from a provincial government someday. The 10-10 plan would be automatic: automatically 10 per cent of provincial revenues, automatically 10 per cent of potential surpluses.

An Hon. Member: Automatically \$400 million less.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has the floor. Thank you.

Please carry on, hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: I feel the need to point out that in this government's capital plan . . . [interjection] Thank you, Member for Airdrie. If I remember the government's capital plan correctly, two years from now I think your capital spending is the same as ours, never mind the debt you're going to leave our kids and our grandkids. So thank you very much, hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very, very much for the opportunity to have the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dorward: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please put me on the list of those who love this motion. I'm glad to be able to speak to it. My family has had a long-time association with the North Saskatchewan River, particularly in the Edmonton area.

Mr. Rodney: Did you frolic?

Mr. Dorward: I have never frolicked in the river. Full information there.

I with my brother and father founded a trail called the Waskahegan hiking trail in 1967. In 1968 my brother and I hiked that trail. We hiked about 165 miles of that trail. It starts in the river valley. I've fished in the river for goldeye, and I've been many times in a canoe going down the river.

This whole concept of a trail, Mr. Speaker, is one that's been around for a long time. It was first proposed by an architect, indeed, in 1907, I believe. As an extension of what Peter Lougheed did the year after I got married, which is 39 years ago,

the whole trail system expanded, and it certainly makes sense to go all the way from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan.

In my area, in Gold Bar, there's a monument. There's a plaque, and on that plaque it reads the following:

Capital City Recreation Park . . .

On April 26, 1974, Premier Peter Lougheed and the sixteen Edmonton Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta announced the approval of the "Capital City Recreation Park" for the City of Edmonton. This unique urban park plan, estimated to cost in excess of 35 million dollars . . .

Now, that's interesting; contrast that with the cost we're faced with today.

. . . was initiated and developed by the Government of Alberta with input from the City of Edmonton.

The main features of this unique Park, a cooperative enterprise between the City of Edmonton and the Alberta government, include:

- A series of new provincial and city parks and recreation areas involving over 3000 acres of land on either side of a 16 kilometer stretch of the North Saskatchewan River, commencing at the High Level Bridge and terminating two kilometers north of the Beverly Bridge and including the Legislature area
- A Natural Resources Science Centre depicting the growth of Alberta's natural resources
- A series of six pedestrian and bicycle river and highway crossings, strategically located along the river and connected to approximately 46 kilometers of foot paths, bicycle trails, observation posts, park bench areas and horticultural displays throughout the 16 kilometer stretch of the river valley
- Several man-made lakes in river parks and the possible creation of a river valley lake by placing a weir across the North Saskatchewan River to permit recreation sports events.
- A "Water Conservation Area" encompassing a minimum 240 meter set-back from each shore-line of the river with appropriate bank protection, terrain and landscape long the river.

This Park is our vision of a good quality of life to be enjoyed by the people of Edmonton and by their children.

Peter Lougheed, Premier.

Then, Mr. Speaker, in 1979 I was blessed to be able to work for a company in Calgary which at the time did a tremendous amount of the initial work in Kananaskis park. Kananaskis park, of course, is world renowned for its attractiveness in terms of individuals being able to go and enjoy the great outdoors, as they will be able to do when, with the help of this motion, the government devotes the resources to the project.

In 1980 I was blessed, being involved in that same company, to be involved in all the tree planting that took place in this very capital city park, so I watched the expansion of the asphalt trail system that was done that year and all of the planting that took place.

I'm very much in favour of pushing this project forward with great expediency to be able to see it become a place where people will come from all over and have it as a central feature, indeed, of our capital city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, I noticed you quoted extensively from a document. Our rules state that you should table that document, so I'm just cautioning you that in the

future I don't think you might want to table your iPad. Just a reminder that if you're going to quote extensively from something, the rules require that you table that typical document. So just a reminder for the future.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

5:40

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of this motion because of the years of experience I've had walking trails and enjoying the scenery here in Edmonton. My hometown, Whitecourt, had a wonderful campground just north of there called Carson-Pegasus. I had a fantastic time there wandering up and down the trails as my family would camp at the Carson-Pegasus. When I moved to Red Deer – for any of you who have been to Red Deer, Red Deer actually has quite an extensive trail network within the city – I would spend hours with my friend Lyle rollerblading up and down the trails there, enjoying the scenery along the river.

You know, here in Edmonton you have the same opportunity. I used to come to regionals here for the Summer Swimming Association. When we were done with the swim meet, what would we do? We would leave the Kinsmen centre, down on the riverbank here, and we would wander around the trails. We'd come across the river. We'd go down through the parkways. You know, it was quite beautiful, and it was quite entrancing. As a child you actually get the opportunity to look around and see what beauty there is within our natural habitats, and they can exist within the city here. That's why motions like Motion 514 are so vitally important to the province and to the city. I mean, it's wonderful that the capital region river valley parkway has been working with the government and, hopefully, will continue to work with the government on this.

Now, you know, I'd like to give a little shout-out here to the Wildrose 10-10 plan as well. I mean, can you imagine a better program, where the province would actually share its revenue on an annual basis so that communities knew what was coming and could plan accordingly so that they didn't have to go cap in hand every year or every couple of years or after every election and wonder: are we going to get this funding for – I don't know – this parkway? They shouldn't have to come cap in hand. We shouldn't have to be worried about whether or not some of the members have been frolicking in the parkway and would actually like to see these projects put forward.

I mean, let's put together a comprehensive plan so that municipalities can proactively plan in the future for more of these types of projects. It's an absolutely wonderful plan that would enhance a municipality's ability to create more of these spaces. They could actually use the dollars when they wanted to use them on the projects they needed to use them on rather than having to come back to you, the government, every single time for a grant.

With the Wildrose 10-10 plan we'd actually give 10 per cent of provincial revenue directly to municipalities. With a budget surplus another 10 per cent of that surplus would be given to towns, cities, and communities so that we could further enhance the lives of people not only here in Edmonton but in Red Deer, in Lacombe, in Ponoka, in Blackfalds, in Medicine Hat, in Fort McMurray.

An Hon. Member: In Altario.

Mr. Fox: In Altario. You know, that's an area of the province we don't hear about very often here in this Legislature, and we should hear about it more. I actually get to travel through Altario fairly often when I'm on my way to Manitoba. There are some very interesting trails and features out that way that maybe don't get the attention that they deserve. You pass through coulees on the way. There are no trails there either.

Maybe we should be putting forward a plan so those counties and municipalities can use funds when they need to and on what they want to, again, rather than coming cap in hand to you, the provincial government, and having to beg for motions like Motion 514 to improve the city for the citizens of Alberta.

You know, the one thing that is nice about this project is that it is preserving nature in Edmonton's river valley system. It is a point of pride for Edmontonians, and it is a point of pride across political lines. I have had the opportunity, since being elected, to wander through some of those trail systems, too. They really are beautiful. To connect them all together is a wonderful project. Out in Lacombe this summer we just connected to the Trans Canada Trail. We had a wonderful ceremony just outside the Lacombe research station. It's a beautiful trail that kind of winds its way through the Lacombe research station and through the park system that's there as well. It connects us with Blackfalds and with Red Deer, and it connects the trail systems in those communities. Within the next two years we're actually going to see it connect to Ponoka as well.

It's wonderful that there are groups of people that are coming together to ask for motions like Motion 514 so that trail systems can be connected and Albertans can enjoy the beauty that exists in nature within the cities here in this province.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also in favour of the motion brought by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung. I think it's a very forward-looking motion. The Edmonton river valley, obviously, is a beautiful asset for the city of Edmonton and for the whole province.

I think that one thing we don't do enough of is that long-range planning for the future. We have a province right now which has just passed 4 million in population. Two-thirds of that population lives in our two largest cities. It is really imperative for those people that live in urban settings like Calgary and Edmonton that we set aside areas where they can enjoy the environment and the natural areas as well as recreational facilities.

I would like to point out that we had a similar situation in the city of Calgary, where some foresighted individuals in 1980 created Nose Hill park, which is in my riding of Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill. It's one of the largest urban parks in all of North America. That area was slated for residential development. It is now used by tens of thousands of people on a weekly basis. It's a tremendous asset for the city of Calgary.

Another one that we created was the Glenbow Ranch, which is right on the urban fringe of the city of Calgary. The government of Alberta had the foresight about seven or eight years ago to set aside that land and for that purpose set \$40 million aside to purchase that piece of property.

That's the type of thing that we need to do more of. We have growing cities, large metropolitan areas which need to have those recreational assets. I think this is a very foresighted motion, and I urge all my colleagues to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Stony Plain, or are you calling the question?

Mr. Lemke: I'll call the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. However, hon. members, I have four minutes left before the mover is allowed five minutes to close. If you want to speak to it, you can. If not, I can recognize another member.

Mr. Lemke: I'll speak to it, then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to continue debate on Motion 514, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. As my colleagues have previously mentioned, Motion 514 looks for continued support for the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park in Edmonton. Promoting ongoing efforts to create an integrated river valley park could help raise our capital region's global profile. Representing my constituents here at the Legislature, I have had the privilege of being surrounded by the picturesque Edmonton river valley. We really do have access to its paths and bridges almost right at our doorstep.

Mr. Speaker, history shows just how society has valued green spaces and park places. From the early 18th century the importance of beautiful, landscaped gardens and green spaces has informed art, history books, paintings, and various other visual mediums. Travellers would come from across Europe to visit what many considered to be landscape works of art. In fact, many of these green spaces inspired the artwork of world-renowned artists and painters just as the artists' own paintings often inspired the landscaping of other gardens across Europe.

Many of the world's most renowned parks and green spaces exist in Europe today as a result of that. In Barcelona the construction of Park Güell began in 1900. This site was originally prepared by celebrated artist Antonio Gaudi in order to display and showcase his urban planning concerns. The creator's vivid imagination is revealed in the different elements that amaze its visitors. Park Güell has become a destination for new and seasoned travellers from around the world.

Central Park in New York City is another world-renowned green space that has become a destination for the city's residents and visitors alike. After seeing a rapid decline in the care and maintenance of this space, many public and private entities have worked together to return it to its former splendour as America's first and foremost major urban public space. Since beginning its restoration, Central Park has once again become a destination for visitors in a bustling metropolitan centre.

5:50

Another world-class park a little closer to home here in Alberta is Stanley Park in Vancouver. As Vancouver's first park, with its ever-blooming gardens, pristine coastal areas, and roughly 500,000 cedar, fir, and hemlock trees, Stanley Park has continued to live up to its green-space designation for over 120 years. Mr. Speaker, Stanley Park has become a must-see tourist destination for those visiting Vancouver. Like our capital region green space, Stanley Park offers a tranquil oasis and a perfect escape right within a busy city centre.

Right here in Edmonton and its surrounding area there are 22 major parks with over 150 kilometres of trails suitable for walks, bike rides, picnics, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and more.

The very size of our park is something to rival the likes of even Stanley Park. For this reason, it is important that we take advantage of the expansive green space we have at our doorstep. Promoting a single, integrated, protected parks system and working with the city of Edmonton to implement its ribbon of green concept plan could see Edmonton and all of Alberta come to the forefront of travel destinations for international visitors.

Of course, when considering support for this initiative, it is important that we continue to consult the views of the surrounding municipalities. At the time these plans were initially envisioned, the fiscal environment was quite different. Since then, we have been through one of the worst global economic downturns, and many jurisdictions have yet to recover. That is why we must ensure that all of the members of the River Valley Alliance are still onboard with this project and that their needs and priorities are fully respected. This is especially pertinent given the recent municipal elections, which have seen many changes in councils and boards across the province.

That being said, having an integrated parks system right here in our capital region would increase the province's reputation as a tourist destination across the world, and I will be voting in support of it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate on Motion 514.

Mr. Xiao: I would love to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 514 proposes to continue supporting the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park. The overarching theme that I would like to highlight with this motion is the spirit of collaboration. The fundamental principle that holds communities together and promotes an unwavering sense of unity is collaboration. Again, the River Valley Alliance involves the co-operative efforts of seven unique and proud municipalities that were brought together in their efforts to create a vibrant and dynamic outdoor space that all Albertans can enjoy.

Motion 514 highlights the intergovernmental efforts that have benefited from the support of all three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. Alberta is blessed to house the largest stretch of city parkland in North America, and I believe that in time it will become one of the world's most recognizable city spaces.

Mr. Speaker, by creating an urban outdoor space that is accessible to everyone, this allows individuals from across our great province to appreciate its treasures. World-class parks are defining characteristics that add to the attractiveness of any cosmopolitan city, cities such as New York, Paris, Barcelona, and also, like my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, Hyde Park in London. No one can argue with the health and economic benefits that such outdoor spaces provide to both citizens and tourists alike.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding the debate on Motion 514, I would like to urge all members to take time to go out and enjoy our great river valley, truly a sublime gift from nature. When you do, try not to forget the hard work and effort and the time that has been invested in creating such a wonderful space.

Again, I would like to thank all of my colleagues that have participated in this debate on Motion 514. I urge all members to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 514 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we had an omission earlier. It's my fault. We did not receive the report from the Committee of the Whole. I would seek your unanimous consent that we receive that report now. Are any opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The words just came to me. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and reports progress on Bill 206. I wish

to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

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

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