



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature  
Second Session

# Alberta Hansard

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Issue 13

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Speaker  
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont (PC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Allen, Mike, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (Ind)  
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)  
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie (W),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Anglin, Joe, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)  
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)  
Bhardwaj, Hon. Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)  
Bhullar, Hon. Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)  
Bikman, Gary, Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)  
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND)  
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),  
Liberal Opposition House Leader  
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)  
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)  
Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),  
Government House Leader  
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort (PC)  
Casey, Ron, Banff-Cochrane (PC)  
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)  
Dallas, Hon. Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)  
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)  
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Acadia (PC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Donovan, Ian, Little Bow (W)  
Dorward, David C., Edmonton-Gold Bar (PC),  
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Drysdale, Hon. Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND),  
New Democrat Opposition Whip  
Fawcett, Hon. Kyle, Calgary-Klein (PC)  
Fenske, Jacquie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC)  
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W)  
Fox, Rodney M., Lacombe-Ponoka (W)  
Fraser, Hon. Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)  
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)  
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)  
Griffiths, Hon. Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)  
Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (W)  
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),  
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Horne, Hon. Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)  
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-St. Albert (PC)  
Hughes, Ken, Calgary-West (PC)  
Jansen, Hon. Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)  
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)  
Johnson, Hon. Jeff, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (PC)  
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)  
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL),  
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Kennedy-Glans, Donna, QC, Calgary-Varsity (Ind)  
Khan, Stephen, St. Albert (PC)  
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)  
Kubinec, Maureen, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (PC)  
Lemke, Ken, Stony Plain (PC)  
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)  
Luan, Jason, Calgary-Hawkwood (PC)  
Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC)  
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),  
Leader of the New Democrat Opposition  
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)  
McDonald, Everett, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)  
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
McQueen, Hon. Diana, Drayton Valley-Devon (PC)  
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),  
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Deputy Government House Leader  
Olesen, Cathy, Sherwood Park (PC)  
Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC),  
Deputy Government House Leader  
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (PC)  
Pedersen, Blake, Medicine Hat (W)  
Quadri, Sohail, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Quest, Hon. Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC)  
Redford, Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC)  
Rodney, Hon. Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Rowe, Bruce, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)  
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)  
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),  
Official Opposition Whip  
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Leader of the Liberal Opposition  
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (W),  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Starke, Hon. Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)  
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)  
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)  
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)  
Towle, Kerry, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W),  
Official Opposition Deputy Whip  
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC),  
Government Whip  
Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)  
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (Ind)  
Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),  
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)  
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)  
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

## Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58

Wildrose: 17

Alberta Liberal: 5

New Democrat: 4

Independent: 3

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Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Minister of Human Services
Robin Campbell	Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development
Cal Dallas	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
Wayne Drysdale	Minister of Transportation
Kyle Fawcett	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southwest Alberta
Rick Fraser	Associate Minister – Public Safety Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for High River
Doug Griffiths	Minister of Service Alberta
Fred Horne	Minister of Health
Doug Horner	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
Sandra Jansen	Associate Minister – Family and Community Safety
Jeff Johnson	Minister of Education, Ministerial Liaison to the Canadian Forces
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Culture
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Richard Starke	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Greg Weadick	Associate Minister – Recovery and Reconstruction for Southeast Alberta
Teresa Woo-Paw	Associate Minister – International and Intergovernmental Relations

## STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

### Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Amery

Deputy Chair: Mr. Fox

Dorward	Pastoor
Eggen	Quadri
Hehr	Rogers
Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
McDonald	

### Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Casey

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Khan
Barnes	Sandhu
Dorward	Sherman
Eggen	

### Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Quadri

Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
Goudreau	Saskiw
Lemke	

### Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Cusanelli	McAllister
DeLong	Notley
Fenske	Pedersen
Fritz	Sandhu
Jablonski	Swann
Jeneroux	VanderBurg
Leskiw	

### Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Jeneroux

Deputy Chair: Mr. McDonald

Bikman	Leskiw
Blakeman	Quadri
Brown	Wilson
DeLong	Young
Eggen	

### Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Zwozdesky

Deputy Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Casey	Mason
Forsyth	McDonald
Fritz	Sherman
Johnson, L.	Towle
Kubinec	

### Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Mr. Xiao

Deputy Chair: Mrs. Leskiw

Allen	Notley
Brown	Olesen
Cusanelli	Rowe
DeLong	Stier
Fenske	Strankman
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	

### Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Ms Kubinec

Deputy Chair: Mr. Rogers

Calahasen	Pastoor
Casey	Pedersen
Kang	Saskiw
Khan	VanderBurg
Luan	Wilson
Notley	Young
Olesen	

### Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Anderson

Deputy Chair: Mr. Dorward

Allen	Khan
Amery	Luan
Barnes	Pastoor
Bilous	Sandhu
Donovan	Sarich
Fenske	Young
Hehr	

### Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Khan

Deputy Chair: Mr. Anglin

Allen	Goudreau
Bikman	Hale
Bilous	Johnson, L.
Blakeman	Webber
Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 7, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, let us pray. O gracious God, help us in our daily duties and guide us with Your wisdom. Remind us to not be judgmental of others, and help us to be understanding of those who may differ from us in cause and purpose. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem now and remain standing after it's over for an additional tribute.

Mr. Robert Clark, will you lead us, please?

### 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.

### Mr. Jonathan Joseph Lord December 29, 1956, to March 26, 2014

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. Today we honour and respect Mr. Jonathan Joseph Lord.

Mr. Jon Lord served this Assembly as the Member for Calgary-Currie for one term, from 2001 to 2004. Mr. Lord came from a background of enterprising action and spirit. He was an entrepreneur who carved out his future first through business and community and then as a two-term alderman for the city of Calgary from 1995 to 2001.

As a Member of this Legislative Assembly Mr. Lord served on numerous committees. In the House he was a vocal proponent of the disadvantaged, a promoter of energy efficiency, and a champion for small business. He laboured tirelessly on behalf of his constituents and his family, and he never stopped contributing to the betterment of his community. Many of us had the honour of serving with him. That means something very special to each of us.

In a moment of silent prayer let us bow our heads and remember Mr. Jon Lord as we may have known him. O Lord, grant unto him eternal rest, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is gratitude that we pay to members of the families who share the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome some very special members of the Lord family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. I will introduce them one at a time. Perhaps they could signal their presence to us with a hand wave, and then we can applaud and thank them all for having been part of Jon's life and, in turn, part of our history: Jon's partner, Sheryl Guillaume, of Calgary; Jon's youngest daughter, Jessica Eren, of Calgary; Jon's son-in-law Deniz Eren of Calgary; Jon's grandson Altan Eren of Calgary; Jon's sister Judy Brown of Edmonton; Jon's brother Dennis Brown of Edmonton; and

Sheryl's daughter-in-law, Tanya Morey, of Calgary. Unfortunately, Jon's other daughters – Mandy, Michelle, and Katie – were not able to be with us here today, but our thoughts and prayers are also with them.

To the Lord family we say thank you, and now we pay our respects through our applause for Mr. Jon Lord. [applause]

Please be seated.

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Welcome to the Premier

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I beg your indulgence just before we go on with the introduction of visitors to make a brief statement. In this respect I would ask that you please hold any applause that you might wish to offer until I have concluded my comments.

I want to take a moment to officially welcome Alberta's 15th Premier, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. First elected to this Assembly in 1997, the hon. member has served as Minister of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Health and Wellness, Minister of Education, Minister of Human Services, and is currently serving as Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. He has also held the role of Government House Leader or Deputy Government House Leader in 16 out of the 17 years that he has served in this Assembly.

On behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I welcome the first Premier of Alberta to be born in the Northwest Territories. He is now Alberta's 15th Premier. Please join me in welcoming the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, Mr. Premier. [Standing ovation]

On that note, I'd ask the hon. Premier to make his first introduction.

1:40

### Introduction of Visitors

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those kind remarks and to all of my colleagues in the House for the warmth that we will have for at least the next minute in this role.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of leaders from our First Nations and Métis communities that are with us here today. They're sitting in your gallery, and I'd ask that they stand as I read their names. From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we have Commissioner Marie Wilson; Education Day co-ordinator Charlene Bearhead; president of the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, Audrey Poitras; and the Assembly of First Nations regional vice-chief, Cameron Alexis. In a few moments I'll be speaking about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events that took place recently here in Edmonton. I'm grateful for our guests' attendance here today and, through them, for all the work that was done by the leadership of the commission and by the commissioners and by all those who acted on their behalf to ensure that we had the event that we had to really discuss an issue of prime importance to Albertans and Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask all members to join me in thanking these dedicated individuals and the individuals they represent for the countless hours of work that they do for our community and for our people. Please give them the traditional warm welcome of the House. [Standing ovation]

**The Speaker:** Welcome.

The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

**Mr. Dallas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Pisan Manawapat, who is the ambassador of Thailand. Welcome also to Mr. Narong Boonsatheanwong, minister-counsellor from the Royal Thai Embassy in Ottawa, and Mr. Yothin Tongpenyai, president of Thailand's petroleum exploration and production company in Canada. Our province is home to a very active community of more than 1,000 Albertans of Thai descent. Ambassador Manawapat's visit is a great opportunity for us to tell Alberta's story as well as explore new areas of co-operation in a variety of sectors. Our esteemed guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Let us begin with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the notes with me, but I believe I'm introducing a group from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, the careers-in-training program from NorQuest College, I think. Forgive me if I'm mumbling my way through your introduction. I know that you students always work really hard and have lots to bring forward. If you're with us in either gallery, please rise so that we may give you an appropriate welcome.

**The Speaker:** Your second introduction, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. It's very kind of you to allow me to do a second introduction. Again, I can't see him, but I am sure that Mickey Wilson is with us in one of the two galleries. I've known Mickey for a very long time. We have marched together and sang and danced together a little bit and stood watch and supported each other through a lot. I was at his wedding. He is now the executive director of the Pride Centre. He's here today to witness the passage – she said hopefully – of my colleague's Motion 503, which is to establish gay-straight alliances in schools if students so wish. Mickey, I hope you're with us now. There he is. Please rise and accept our warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Dorward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 bright young grade 6 students from my wife Janice's alma mater, Forest Heights elementary school, who are here today. These students will be attending School at the Legislature this week, and it's my hope that they gain a positive and constructive understanding of the Legislature. The students are accompanied by their teacher, Marion Fritz, and a volunteer from Kassel, Germany, Christin Noll. I would now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is 33 bright and energetic students

from Delton elementary school. They are accompanied by Mr. Rodney Corkum and Mrs. Dao Haddad, their teachers. I would like to welcome them to the Assembly and ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The second introduction, please.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you two new members of our caucus staff. Sean Steels is a sessional communications officer. He attended the Grant MacEwan public relations program and most recently worked as a co-ordinator with the Works Art & Design Festival here in Edmonton.

Chris Fulmer has recently joined us as a sessional research assistant. Chris has a bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Alberta. He's contributed to numerous political campaigns and is very excited to be working on the front lines helping to keep the government accountable and working towards a better and more inclusive Alberta.

I would now like to ask Chris and Sean to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to everyone here in the Assembly 58 members of St. Edmund school. They are accompanied by Miss Dawn Miskew, Ms Christina Fielden, and Ms Karen Butt. St. Edmund school has the athletic program. I was just there recently, and I'm very pleased to have them here to receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, your guests will arrive later, so let us move on, then, to the Premier, who has an introduction.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of very dedicated and passionate student leaders. The Council of Alberta University Students now represents more than 100,000 students. CAUS recently added the student associations from Mount Royal University and from MacEwan University to its membership. For the next four days these leaders will be in the Legislature discussing key issues with a number of MLAs. This is their advocacy week. Within just a few minutes of meeting this group, you will realize that Alberta's future is incredibly bright thanks to the talented and dedicated young men and women who make up the organization.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you from the University of Alberta Adam Woods, Petros Kusmu, Navneet Khinda, and William Lau; from the University of Calgary Raphael Jacob, Jarett Henry, and Levi Nilson; from the University of Lethbridge Shuna Talbot and Sean Glydon; from Mount Royal University Missy Chareka and Mr. Erik Queenan; from MacEwan Cam McCoy, Ryan Roth, and Ray Khan; and, last but not least, the council's support staff, Beverly Eastham. These students have been advocating on behalf of students from the universities across this province. They do incredible work. Some of them are now retiring – their terms are up – and others are just coming into their terms. I'd ask the House to thank them for the work done, thank them for the work they will do, and give them the incredible warm welcome of the House.

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Allison Sweeney and Dr. John Webb, who specialize in rural family medicine and genetic medicine, respectively. They are here today with the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta, or PARA, to advocate for increased vaccinations for all Albertans. Vaccination is one of the single most effective ways a person can protect their health, that of their family, their workplace, and their community. I would ask all members of the Assembly to please help PARA in accomplishing this important public health goal by resourcing public health and vaccination programs. I would ask Dr. Sweeney and Dr. Webb to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the clock suggests that we ought to be moving to question period, but I have a request from the hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request unanimous consent to waive 7(1.1) and delay Oral Question Period until the ministerial statement and all replies are concluded.

1:50

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Government House Leader has requested that we waive Standing Order 7(1.1) so that question period would begin after Ministerial Statements is completed. It's my understanding that the opposition members have been apprised of the ministerial statement that may be forthcoming, and so, too, have private or independent members.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** We have another eight or nine introductions. Do you wish to do those first, hon. members? We could finish those up? Okay. Well, let's finish those up, then, and please be quick so we can move on with Ministerial Statements.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Red Deer-North.

**Mr. Quadri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my dear friend Mr. Kashmir Gill. Mr. Kashmir Gill is a professional engineer who works as the regional director of the National Research Council of Canada's industrial research assistance program. This program provides technical and business innovation services to mid-sized Canadian companies. Mr. Gill is a very active community volunteer in the community at large. One of his outstanding achievements is to raise money for projects like the Guru Nanak Dev healing garden centre at the University of Alberta hospital. I will ask Mr. Gill to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a number of persons who are here to support Bill 203 in second reading. They are Dr. Gordon Hensel, the registrar for the Alberta College of Optometrists; Bettylyn Baker, a teacher who is very concerned about children with visual impediments to learning; Diane Bergeron, who is the CNIB national director, government relations and advocacy; Lui Greco, who is with the CNIB – he's the Alberta-Northwest Territories director, government relations and advocacy – John McDonald from the CNIB, the Alberta-Northwest

Territories executive director and regional vice-president; Megan Kompf, the CNIB Alberta-Northwest Territories regional manager; Julia Roy from the Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired; Marc Workman, CNIB national manager for consumer advocacy; and Jung-Suk Ryu, manager, communications, CNIB Alberta and Northwest Territories. They are seated in the members' gallery. They're all here to support Bill 203 and to hear second reading. I would ask them all to rise now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Fox:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nicholas Burris. Nick is a resident of the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency and has a very keen interest in global politics. He has recently moved to Lacombe from Melbourne, Australia, looking to retrace his father's roots. Nick, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to, in fact, all members of this Assembly Dr. Kris Wells of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. Dr. Wells is a tremendous advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer youth in this province and throughout the country. I'm proud to have him as my guest on the day we debate a motion and, hopefully, pass that motion designed to continue the good work of making things better for LGBTQ kids today. I would ask Kris to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Associate Minister of Wellness.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Health Day, and April 6 to 12 is Dental Hygienist Week. In recognition of this, we have some very special guests from the college of dental hygienists and the Professional Association of Resident Physicians of Alberta. Dental hygienists play a crucial role in promoting preventative health measures and wellness, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them sincerely for all of their hard work and dedication. Not everyone can do what they do.

PARA is here for the annual resident physicians in the Legislature day. Of course, they are continuing to build relationships with their elected representatives, as discussed, and also discussing many items of health policy. I had the opportunity to meet with all of the intelligent, enthusiastic members of PARA earlier today, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that with these physicians leading our health care system, I know our medical future is in great hands.

At this point I would like to ask not only Dr. Allison Sweeney, PARA vice-president of leadership and education, but also Ms Gerry Cool, past president of the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta and the Alberta director for the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you already did your introduction, or do you have a third introduction? You're done? Thank you.

Edmonton-Meadowlark, you're finished with your introductions, and, Edmonton-Centre, you've completed yours as well. Is that correct? It's just that I have you listed further here.

### Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education.

#### Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to recognize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission having held its seventh and final national event in the city of Edmonton from March 27 to 30. Four years ago the Truth and Reconciliation Commission held its first national event in the city of Winnipeg, the city with then the largest urban aboriginal population in the country. It was fitting that the final national event should take place here as Edmonton has the second-highest aboriginal population in the country and growing.

Indian residential schools operated in our country for 130 years, and approximately 150,000 children attended those schools. In Alberta there were 25 Indian residential schools, the most in any province or territory, and today there are 12,000 survivors in Alberta, the second-highest number in Canada. Over the four days of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathering over 400 residential school survivors related their experiences at those schools and the profound impact on the lives of themselves, their families, and their communities. Parental, family, and cultural breakdown led to profound emotional and spiritual consequences for generations of children.

Over the four days that I was able to attend, I was touched to hear the experiences of the survivors and am still in awe of the courage they displayed by sharing such personal experiences. It was heartwarming to be there with the record number of Albertans and western Canadians in attendance at the commission gathering. I was so pleased also to see so many community leaders attending. I commend Alberta ministers and MLAs who attended the national event, and I would specifically reference the Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who was an honorary listener during the event. We were all there to learn and to listen, to understand this part of our history better. I'd also like to thank Mayor Naheed Nenshi of Calgary and Mayor Don Iveson of Edmonton as well as the mayor of Wetaskiwin, Bill Elliot, for providing a declaration of a year of reconciliation. We look forward to working with them as to how that year of reconciliation can make a difference in our relationships and our results.

Part of the work of the commission, Mr. Speaker, is to help people understand the history of Indian residential schools and to engage Canadians in conversations and expressions of reconciliation about those schools and about the people who were affected. The history of Indian residential schools is not solely an aboriginal history. It is a shared history. It is our history.

It was a proud moment when the Minister of Aboriginal Relations announced to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission how Alberta will move forward through our expression of reconciliation. The Minister of Education is leading some bold work for the provincial kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum to include enhanced mandatory content for all Alberta students on the significance of residential schools and treaties. The government of Alberta commits to continuing work on professional development so that teachers learn about the history and legacy of the residential schools and First

Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and are better prepared to meet the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and youth.

**2:00**

The public national events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may have concluded, but the work, Mr. Speaker, continues. We have an opportunity to write a new chapter in our relationship with aboriginal people, a chapter with a richer and fuller understanding of their experiences and the contributions that aboriginal people make to our province. Indeed, the history of aboriginal people in Alberta is our history. It's an essential part of our history, and the future of aboriginal people in this province is our future. Alberta will continue to build its relationship with aboriginal people to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have every advantage to benefit from Alberta's tremendous economy and great quality of life. Aboriginal people in Alberta deserve to have the same socioeconomic status as all other Albertans, and we are committed to that happening.

**The Speaker:** Sorry; Edmonton-Centre?

**Ms Blakeman:** I was rising to ask for the unanimous consent of the members of the Assembly to allow the other opposition leaders and individual members to speak after the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a request has been put forward. It requires unanimous consent for the leaders of the third and fourth parties to offer their remarks on this subject right after the Official Opposition House Leader has spoken.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Let us move on in the meantime with the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for her remarks.

**Ms Smith:** Thank you, Premier, for your statement.

The final national Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Edmonton saw 3,243 survivors registered, 402 statements gathered, and 30,120 live video streams broadcast to 36 countries over the course of four days. This paramount event helped to forge the path towards the integral process of healing and reconciliation for the victims of the residential school tragedy.

Throughout the weekend many survivors were given the opportunity to share their stories. I was particularly moved by the story of Theodore Fontaine of Winnipeg. Theodore entered residential school in 1948 and spent more than 12 years there. He would later write a book about his experiences. In his words, quote, this was the biggest mistake that Canada ever made; whatever you've heard is incredibly true and is just a fraction of what happened. Unquote. Theodore said that he endured mental, spiritual, and sexual abuse, having been raped repeatedly at a young age. He went through several phases of trauma, confrontation, and healing in his life. Just one month ago he began reliving the abuses. A terrifying nightmare left him lying paralyzed in bed. He said: I always think I'm on my way to reconciliation and a better way of life, but it stays with you.

He went on to share about how he reached out to one of the individuals who molested him in an attempt to bring closure, and the person claimed he didn't remember him. Theodore told him, quote: "I said, 'I'm sorry because for the last 60 years I've hated you and wanted to kill you.' Can you imagine saying that to another human being? That came from me, but it wasn't me speaking. It was the seven-, eight-, and nine-year-old boy getting out whatever was still bothering him after 60-some years."

Unquote. His abuser continued to deny that anything had happened, and Theodore resolved to confront him again at a later date. Within a month he had another face-to-face meeting with him, and at the end as they were wrapping up the meeting, his abuser said: by the way, Theodore, thank you very much for not mentioning my name in your book. Mr. Speaker, there are no words.

A recent study revealed that only 50 per cent of Canadians are aware of the residential school system. One of the long-term goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to ensure that mainstream society is educated on this part of Canada's history as it is a key component of the healing and reconciliation process.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission asserts and we embrace the belief that the truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation. It is my hope that devastating stories like Theodore's are not forgotten and will get us all one step closer to healing once and for all.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Alberta Liberal caucus I am very thankful and feel honoured to live on Treaty 6 lands.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and hear the stories and feel the pain shared by those survivors. The government of Canada guaranteed in return for peace and control of the land to provide for basic needs and the rights of the First Nations people. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Indian Act meant ripping children from their families at a young age, denying them their language and cultural practices, and in many cases physically abusing them and emotionally and mentally abusing them in many of the residential schools across the country. Absent parenting predictably led to absent skills for parenting in subsequent generations and mental health issues and addictions and poverty for many of our First Nations brothers and sisters.

Mr. Speaker, I've spent the majority of my life on the front lines in an inner-city hospital seeing the First Nations of our country overrepresented in the homeless population, overrepresented in the prison system, overrepresented in the human suffering that exists today in our society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was absolutely essential to account for something that has been a horrendous black mark on our society as a civil society in Canada and right here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this is only the beginning. Healing only begins with this, but what we need to do is follow up healing with hope, with a major investment into education, into health care, into really dealing with the real issues of inequality and poverty that still exist today: affordable housing, potable water. We've seen the missing and murdered women, hundreds of them across the country. That has to be atoned for. We have seen the deaths of 741 children right here in Alberta, one child a week dying in government care, 70 per cent of them First Nations, Métis, or Inuit.

These problems, Mr. Speaker, still exist today in the Alberta that we live in. I call on all members of the Assembly along with our Alberta Liberal caucus to not only support the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – and I thank the commission members and all those across the country and the federal leaders for being a part of this. But, my dear friends, we have so much more work to do. As the new Premier said, their

problem is our problem, and the future of the First Nations community is our future. It's a shared humanity and a shared future.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a critical step in moving towards healing, and the Alberta NDP was thankful to attend the final national event in Edmonton. This event was the culmination of several years of work that began with a historic apology on behalf of the people of Canada in the Parliament in 2008. I am proud of the important role that Jack Layton played in bringing that about.

The powerful testimonies of survivors that were shared over the four-day event here in Edmonton were just a glimpse of the damage that residential schools have caused to indigenous cultures and communities. We applaud the courageous women and men who shared their testimony at the event, and we hope that they are finding healing. But the healing does not end with the adjournment of the commission, Mr. Speaker. There's much more that we need to do.

**2:10**

Mr. Speaker, we've heard today that this government will be implementing an enhanced curriculum on residential schools. We sincerely hope that this is a promise that will be kept. While teaching this history is vital, we must do more to remove barriers for indigenous people. We need to open doors for greater opportunity for indigenous students, and we could start by keeping the promise made for aboriginal bursaries for postsecondary education. We could strengthen our consultation process so that indigenous people are true partners in future resource development. We need to do more to address the gross inequality in health and social spending that occurs on reserves and to expand resources dedicated to improving educational outcomes for indigenous children.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for action. Truth and reconciliation must be an ongoing process, and we urge this government to not close the book on this sad history but to continue to push for further healing, inclusiveness, and the removal of inequalities for all indigenous Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon members, I have received a written request to participate in the statements at this time from Calgary-Foothills as an independent member of the Assembly. If anyone is in objection to granting unanimous consent to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, would you please express your objection now?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mr. Webber:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I'd like to join my colleagues in the recognition of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission over the last month. This historic tragedy is one that we need to learn from and respect the incredible hardships that these people faced not only as a group but individually.

The truth and reconciliation approach is a form of restorative justice, aiming to heal the relationships between offenders, victims, and the community in which these tragedies took place. Those involved in truth and reconciliation commissions seek to

uncover facts and distinguish truth from lies. The process allows for acknowledgement, public mourning, forgiveness, and healing.

It is important to remember that Alberta is comprised of many diverse groups, and the provincial kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum's recognition of the study of residential schools and treaties is a vital part of what makes our province so strong.

Having had the incredible honour of being the past Minister of Aboriginal Relations, I have heard first-hand how important the learning of the history and legacy of all of Alberta's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples is to these groups. I am convinced that knowledge of past successes and failures will greatly increase our ongoing ability to recognize and honour the contributions by aboriginal peoples to all Albertans.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I have received two final written requests here for participation. Again, it requires unanimous consent. One is from the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and the other is from the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I'll ask one question. If anyone objects to giving unanimous consent to these two individuals expressing their brief comments on this matter, would you please express so now?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the darkest moments of our history is the history that has affected many individuals like Theodore, like my father, like my mother, and like myself but also many nations, and its effect has been felt and will continue to be felt for many generations. As a result, we have experienced many ills in my community, ills that we've had to live with.

Mr. Speaker, I was a small girl, a tiny girl. When I was born, I weighed two pounds. When I went to school, I was the smallest girl, and I had to go to residential school. Being small is really not as much of an advantage as overweight people think it's an advantage. It was not an advantage. It was not a good time. The nuns were very cruel. They used to pick on me because I was so tiny. Many times I was hit by a ruler; it was always across the back. I do have scars from that. But I did get through it. It was no fun. I was probably the least of those that were affected by physical abuse. That physical abuse was no fun.

But I had a protector, and that protector was very good. The last time that the nun came to hit me, the protector got up and grabbed the ruler and broke it across her knee, and she said, "You'll never hit her again," and hit her in the face with her fist. I still don't condone any kind of physical activity against people. However, that day many of us children who were abused physically and in whatever way that we were abused were surrounding the girl who was hitting the nun, and we were yelling: kill her; kill her; kill her. That's no way for kids to react.

This is just one example, like the example of Theodore, of the stories that the commission has heard. Mine was not as bad as some of the others like my father's or my mother's. They experienced that physical and sexual behaviour, that I believe was so wrong to do to children. I don't care who you are. I don't care what colour you are. That kind of physical therapy, as they used to call it, didn't help us. It created a lot of problems in our community and in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the commissioners and the work that they have done. I commend them for being so strong, for listening to our stories. They are our stories. As the onion was peeled from

some of the people's soul, you got to the inner core of that individual. The only way that we can heal is by making sure that people know and understand the kinds of things we've gone through.

Thank you to the commissioners. Thank you to the government of Canada for establishing this commission. But I encourage them to also make sure they can release some of those files so that we can continue on our journey of healing.

What is it to reconcile? What are we reconciling? Are we reconciling the harm? Are we reconciling the fact that we have broken people? Are we reconciling the fact that we have so many things to do, that affect us today in the policy decisions we make? Whether it's in children's services with all the children or whether it's in the jails with all the people who are in there, what is it that we need to do?

It's just the beginning, Mr. Speaker. It's not the end. It is the beginning. And it's up to us as people who make policies to ensure that we continue to do that, to make sure that other children do not get harmed in this way. It is a dark time in our history, actually, and it's up to us to make sure that we get things done in the right way so that we can begin to see that people who need to be healed get healed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Standing ovation]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:20

**Mr. Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to first of all thank the Premier for his comments today on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I'd also thank all of the other hon. members that have spoken to that, in particular my friend and colleague the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for her very personal and touching comments. I'd also thank all the survivors who demonstrated a tremendous amount of courage in sharing their stories. I think it's important.

As well, I would like to acknowledge Willie Littlechild from the riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who was the only commission member from Alberta, and thank him for his work on the commission.

I commend the government on its commitment to enhancing the K to 12 educational curriculum to include more content about the tragedy of the residential schools and the treaties. It's so important that we continue to educate our teachers and students so that this tragedy is never repeated and never forgotten.

While I share the sentiments of many of my colleagues in this Chamber that this Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work has had a healing effect, there is still more work that must be done. It's important to acknowledge the horrors faced by the victims of residential schools, but we must not turn a blind eye to other victimized groups within this unique population. There are five First Nations and many Métis people in my region, and I've heard from many of them that more work still must be done. I'm pleased to hear that the Premier said that the work continues.

While this commission has been a step forward, I feel it's disconcerting that the federal government continues to reject the calls by aboriginal and Métis groups across the country for an independent public inquiry into the murders and disappearances of aboriginal women. Aboriginal women, Mr. Speaker, accounted for at least 8 per cent of homicide victims in Canada between 2004 and 2010 despite the fact that they only account for 4 per cent of the total female population. Further, aboriginal women are twice as likely to suffer domestic violence and much more likely than other women to be attacked by strangers. While I appreciate the

work the government has done on this commission, I strongly urge our government to demand that the federal government hold a national inquiry into the murders and disappearances of these women. Having heard the heartbreaking stories during this commission, let us not turn a blind eye to further tragedies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, we have a young school group that has travelled a long way to be here today and has an equally long trip home, so I would ask that we allow a certain member to please introduce them briefly and revert to introductions. Does anybody object?

[Unanimous consent granted]

### Introduction of Guests

*(continued)*

**The Speaker:** Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you're up.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you the grade 6 class of Bentley, Alberta, from my constituency, the best and the brightest. If I could ask them to please rise real quick and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it has been a very historic day today, with the tributes given to the truth and reconciliation process. To the committee members who are here, thank you for joining us and sitting in my Speaker's gallery. It's an honour to have you here.

However, that has also meant that we have extended ourselves beyond the normal time constraints, which was well worth it, I'm sure you would all agree. Nonetheless, I would ask for your unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7), that would allow us to continue the daily Routine until it is completed even if it means going beyond 3 p.m. Does anyone object to granting unanimous consent for that purpose?

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, all.

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** Let us begin. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

#### Severance Payments to Premier's Office Staff

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the former Premier's resignation was another expensive day for Alberta taxpayers. Nine of her departing staffers raked in \$1.3 million in severance and vacation payouts, including more than \$400,000 for her chief of staff alone. But here's the uncomfortable truth. The Premier's senior staff are approved by cabinet through orders in council, which means every single cabinet minister had a hand in allowing these severance payouts to be dumped on Alberta taxpayers. To the Premier: why were these ridiculous contracts approved?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I believe appointments of senior staff come to cabinet. I don't necessarily believe that the contracts come to cabinet. Nonetheless, when one hires senior political staff, there are a number of pieces which need to be taken into

account. First of all, there is no security whatsoever. Secondly, there is a six-month cooling-off period when they leave their office. So whether they're there for a month or for a year or for five years, there's a cooling-off period. Contracts of employment include a severance pay of one month per year up to six months in the normal course.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, we've seen one year of severance for one year's worth of work, and that's excessive by anyone's standards.

That's not the only thing this cabinet approves. Through an order in council dated June 21, 2012, they increased the maximum salaries allowed for the Premier's senior staff. If that wasn't bad enough, the Premier's chief of staff was then hired at a salary \$40,000 higher than the newly increased maximum. All of this happened with the full buy-in of the PC cabinet. Again to the Premier: when are he and his colleagues going to accept responsibility for this latest severance fiasco?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, of course it's our responsibility as government to be accountable for what's happened, and we take full responsibility for that. The fact of the matter is that those staff have now gone. There has been a change in leadership. There's been a change in process. The previous Premier apologized to the public for some of the mistakes that were made. I would apologize to the public for the mistakes that were made as well. But let's understand that the nature of these contracts is to bring in the best people you can to do work on behalf of Albertans. Sometimes that requires that you pay above scale, so you make that change. And severance is important because . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Second supplemental.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, by now it should be pretty obvious that the government can't just blame their former leader for all of their problems. Every cabinet minister is directly responsible for what seems like a never-ending parade of perks for political appointees, and they all sat around the table and approved them, not exactly a winning platform on which to launch a leadership campaign. Again to the Premier: is he going to do anything to clean up this mess, or is he just going to keep on defending?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the hon. member would want in terms of cleaning up the mess. In fact, the people that she's talking about are not working in the office any longer. I don't think that she's accurate in terms of saying that every member of cabinet was around making those decisions. Nonetheless, we accept responsibility for those decisions. I can assure you that going forward, we will adhere to the policy that's in place: one month's severance for each year worked, with a minimum of six months because there's a six-month cooling-off period. You're bringing good people in from the private sector to help government, to help Albertans. You want good people, and you need to pay them appropriately, and there needs to be fair severance.

**The Speaker:** Second main set of questions. The hon. opposition leader.

#### Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let's see if they'll take any responsibility for another scandal. The details surrounding the ex-

Premier's plans for an ultra swanky penthouse atop the federal building are deeply troubling, but more troubling are the conflicting stories that they're now telling. The Minister of Transportation, who was the Minister of Infrastructure at the time the project was being planned, told newspapers that the project was killed in November of 2012. But the new Infrastructure minister said that he killed the project in January of 2014. To either of the ministers, who now have had two weeks to try to get their stories straight: which one of you is telling the truth?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we're both telling the truth.

What's really interesting here is that the Leader of the Opposition seems very concerned about something that isn't happening. In fact, there's no residential component in that building now, and there won't be when it's opened. That's what we've told the public. That's final. That's the truth. We think that's in Albertans' best interests.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure is clearly trying to launch his leadership campaign by bragging to the media that he personally killed the sky palace project in January, but this was after he spent weeks dodging media questions about the issue. He now says he issued orders cancelling the project, but this isn't mentioned in any of the internal e-mails that were released. To the minister: can he tell us exactly how and when he cancelled the sky palace project, and will he table evidence to back up his claims? [interjections]

2:30

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, you sat quietly and heard the question. Let's sit quietly and hear the answer, please.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, I did the hon. member one better than to table evidence; I invited the media through to see it so they could see for themselves that there is no suite there. Done and done. The fact is that regardless of what the hon. member believes or is trying to cast aspersions on, there is no residence there. There won't be one built when it's opened. It's not happening.

The fact is that if the hon. member doesn't like change orders, perhaps she shouldn't have put one in just a couple of months ago after signing off last May on the very same building.

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, at least the jobs minister is starting to get it. He told a Calgary newspaper that this PC government has lost the moral authority to govern, and on this side we couldn't agree more. I said the same thing just last month. This sky palace project was one of the worst displays of entitlement and arrogance that I have ever seen coming out of this government. To the Premier or any other member of cabinet: when all of this was going on, why didn't any of you have the integrity to just say no?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we act as a government, and I would say that it's not happening. That's proof right there that a decision was made to not do it. The only thing I might give the hon. member a little bit of credit for is that it was determined that it was a bad idea. We have a lot of ideas. Some are good; some are bad. This was a bad idea that was stopped, and the evidence is right there. In fact, again, I invited the media in the other day to have a look for themselves. I didn't hear any of them use "swanky" after they were done there in their reports after. That was a word that I didn't hear any of the media use. If I'm wrong, I'll be happy to be corrected, but I didn't hear that.

**The Speaker:** Third and final set of questions, hon. leader.

#### Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of the absence of moral authority and some other bad ideas, Albertans were shocked to learn that in 1977 the PC Party created a mechanism to avoid political accountability and transparency. The TAPCAL trust is a secret slush fund which allows the PCs and only the PCs to have access to an account which has been illegal for everyone else since 1978. The PCs are brazenly doing things that other parties are prohibited from doing, and this government defends it. To the Premier: how did we end up with one law for the PC Party and another law for everybody else?

#### Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, let's craft questions in such a way that they don't violate the rules and the traditions and the conventions. [interjections] Excuse me. I'm not having a debate with you. I'm just saying: let's be careful in crafting our questions in such a way that they do not violate page 504 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein it says that a question should not "concern internal party matters." So just be careful how you phrase your questions.

The hon. Premier to respond.

#### Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account

(continued)

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that there wasn't one law for the governing party and one law for the others. What happened was that there was a transition from an old financing model to a new one under the election finances and contributions act, and the party that had money had to do something with that money and did it in a legal way. Any other party that had resources at the time would have been able to avail themselves of exactly the same law. The fact of the matter is that that has not been a secret fund. People have known about it. It's been reported on. Every time the annual report is filed, the indication is there. The interest has been paid out of the fund. It's not news this year. It wasn't news last year. It wasn't . . .

**The Speaker:** First supplemental, hon. member.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, this secret PC slush fund negates over 30 years of improvements in donations transparency. Other than the PCs, no one knows who put the money in the trust. We don't know what, if any, favours they got in exchange. We have to take the PCs at their word that they haven't added any money to the trust since it isn't audited. What everyone else does know is that TAPCAL trust gives the PCs an unfair advantage which is illegal for all other parties. How is it that no one on the government side had the moral authority to speak out for equal treatment of all political parties for the last 30 years?

**Mr. Hancock:** It's not a secret fund, Mr. Speaker. It's been talked about every year when the annual reports are filed, to my knowledge. The interest in that fund has been paid out and has been reported every year. Every year. It's not news. It's not new. It's been there since the transition. [interjections] It was a transition fund from the old processes to the new processes. I think it was 1977 that that happened, so there have been no contributions to the fund. There's been nothing that's happened

with that fund other than it pays some money on an annual basis, and it's reported on an annual basis under the current laws.

### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

**The Speaker:** Please. Enough of the interjections and the loud yelling across the bow. I heard Edmonton-Centre chiming in. I heard Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and perhaps others. Pretty soon we're going to hear some government members responding, I'm sure. So before it gets out of hand, let's please return to some decorum here.

Let's move on with your final supplemental.

### Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account (continued)

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, as we've shown before, the PCs have made a common practice of soliciting and accepting illegal donations from prohibited corporations. We also learned they created a loophole in order to bypass donation limits, and now we discover that they have a trust account to ensure a permanent advantage over all other political parties. Will the Premier assure us that there are no other secret accounts, that the amounts and donors of this TAPCAL trust will be fully disclosed, and that he will give us a timeline for when it will be dissolved?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how I could disclose other secret accounts because if they're secret, I don't know about them. I can assure you that I don't know of any other accounts. However, I have asked the party leadership, the president of the party and the executive director of the party, to review with their executive the trust fund and what it would take to wind it up in the interest of total transparency. I believe that they will be addressing that. It is in their hands to do. I don't know the terms of the trust. I've never known the terms of the trust. But I have asked them to review it and determine what should happen going forward because we do not need to have this kind of a discussion every year when the financial report . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and Liberal leader.

### Flood Recovery Communications Contracts

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Former PC Treasurer Mr. Dinning said that the next Premier needs to purge this government of its sense of entitlement. However, the current Premier said that any talk about a Tory culture of entitlement and corruption is absolute garbage. Well, Navigator's January 31 press release saying that they completed seven contracts from 2011 to 2013 worth more than a half-million dollars seems to support what Mr. Dinning said. Premier, if giving untendered contracts to the who's who of Tory land isn't entitlement or cronyism, then what the heck is?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of conversations about the Navigator contract around the floods. It wasn't news even in March because, as the hon. member has indicated, Navigator themselves put out a news release in January talking about the contracts. The fact of the matter is that virtually all of the contracts in this government go through an RFP process, with appropriate competition, but there are some times, in unique circumstances or when you need a unique talent, when you can

sole source a contract. That has nothing to do with whom you know; it has to do with what you can do.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, the flood happened in June. The contract was signed October 28 to end October 31, for a quarter of a million dollars.

Continuing on the theme of the PC culture of entitlement, any government contract worth over \$75,000 must be tendered out. Navigator's press release shows four different contracts with the Ministry of Health, each under that amount, totalling almost \$220,000. It looks like a deliberate attempt to skirt the rules to benefit this Tory land PR firm, which also now employs a former chief of staff. To the Premier: is this the kind of thing you're going to let your current Health minister get away with?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member time after time after time has talked about a contract being signed in late September, October. What he would understand if he'd ever done any business in the world is that sometimes you have to get on with the job and do the paperwork later. That's exactly what happened in that contract. The flood relief work was absolutely necessary. It was absolutely to let Albertans know what was going on, and the government brought on the talent that they needed in order to do that. That's what happened. That was good business for Albertans. That was excellent work for Albertans, and it needed to be done.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, do the work and sign their contract later. Wow. You know, it almost seems like a special rule designed for something that the current executive director of the PC Party had done in the past.

When the Premier's immediate predecessor was Minister of Justice, Navigator received yet another contract, this one worth more than \$107,000, which they completed in 2010. The former Premier condoned this PC culture of entitlement. The current Health minister condones the PC culture of entitlement. To the Premier: when will you put an end to this PC culture of entitlement?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, continually repeating a phrase does not make it accurate. What we do is hire the right people to do a job. [interjections] In the vast majority of circumstances those processes of contracting out go through an RFP process or a process that's a competitive process to hire. In some circumstances, because of the unique circumstances or the unique service being provided, there are sole-source contracts. It doesn't happen very often, but when it's done, it's done for a purpose. [interjections]

2:40

### Speaker's Ruling Decorum

**The Speaker:** You know, there are just days when you just don't know how to even address you folks. [interjections] Some of you folks, pardon me.

I've noticed a little bit of a change today. I've actually noticed government members listening much more attentively and more respectfully, and some opposition members – some – are doing the same. For some it's a habit to do so. Yet for others: you continue to do these outbursts, which I know that television and radio don't capture, but we certainly do here. You all know what I'm talking about.

Please let this be the last time I have to remind you today. No more of these what I can only consider to be childish types of outbursts. Questions have been asked. They're very serious questions. Opposition is trying to hold the government accountable. Government is trying their best to answer back, but it's hard to do so over the loud shouting and yelling that is becoming characteristic of today's question period. So please let us remember that and move on, shall we?

I know we'll have a good demonstration right now from the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm always nice to them on their first day and on their last day. Unfortunately, this is not his first day.

### Government Policies

**Mr. Mason:** Albertans have been appalled by the litany of broken promises and stories of extravagance and entitlement. Hopes that this would end with the new leader appear to have been dashed given the statements by the new Premier. It appears that everything was fine all along, Mr. Speaker, and nothing really needs to change. My question is to the Premier. Will he take steps to eliminate the PC culture of entitlement, starting by admitting that it actually exists?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, for some 43 years people have been moving to this province because it's the best place to live, to work, and to raise your family. That's not by accident. Not by accident. Other places have resources; other places have opportunity. But Alberta is the place where people have a stable government that's worked in the best interest of Albertans for all that time. Have we made mistakes? Absolutely. Absolutely, we make mistakes, and we learn from those mistakes. We will continue to work on behalf of Albertans, and we will continue to make it the best place to live, to work, and to raise your family.

**The Speaker:** Well, that lasted a full 30 seconds. The hon. leader. First supplemental.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. North Korea has a stable government, too.

Albertans had hoped that the culture of bullying and intimidation would come to an end with the departure of the last Premier. The prime examples of this, of course, were bills 45 and 46, which abolished the collective bargaining rights of provincial employees and infringe on their and our freedom of speech. To the Premier: will this government show Albertans that it wants to get rid of this culture of bullying and intimidation, that it gets it, and repeal bills 45 and . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, other places in the world have certainly had long-serving governments, but they don't have the business and cultural environment that we have in this province. They don't have the quality of life that we have in this province. That's the reason why a hundred thousand people are moving to this province every year. Albertans want to have good government, and they get good government from this government. Yes, we make mistakes, and we will because we're human. We will apologize for those mistakes, and we will move on. This is the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and it's because of good government, that's been entrusted to this party by the people of Alberta.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, I'll admit that this government is better than North Korea, Mr. Speaker, but whoop-de-do.

Albertans are hoping that this government's culture of broken promises will also change under a new leader. Ending child poverty, full-day kindergarten, and sustainable, predictable funding for education and health care are promises made by this party, this government, in the last election. Will the Premier undertake to ensure that these and other promises are kept, and if he will, how is he going to do it?

**Mr. Hancock:** Thirty-four seconds, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, absolutely, this government is going to continue to work very hard to deliver on the promises it made to Albertans. We are going to continue to invest in our families and our communities because they're the backbone of the province. It's what makes that quality of life, that every Albertan has the opportunity to be part of the advantages that we have in this province. It's something we have to work for because right now there are too many Albertans who don't get that chance. This government is committed to working with Albertans to make sure that every Albertan has the opportunity to participate in the advantages that we have here and the opportunities we have here through education, through all the other challenges that we have . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

No more preambles to your supplementaries, please. Let's start with Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by Airdrie.

### Education Property Tax

**Mr. Allen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2000 the government began a mitigation strategy on education property taxes for communities experiencing rapid increases in property values. When the province removed the mitigative measures last year, it meant a 40 per cent tax hike, averaging about \$400 to \$700 per home in Wood Buffalo, and the same increase is about to be imposed again this year on my constituents, hard-working families who already pay more for their housing than anyone else in Canada. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What can be done to help those long-term residents on fixed incomes or those who work in the service sector or those who otherwise . . .

**The Speaker:** The Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo for asking that question of me today. You know, I think that in every community seniors and some others are going to be challenged with the cost of property taxes. That's one of the reasons we've brought in the property tax deferral program this year, to allow seniors specifically – but in those communities that we're talking about, in 2012 we decided to fund education differently, and we collect the tax in a different way. At that time we wanted to make it equal for everyone in the province.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Allen:** Thank you. To the same minister: as I've requested in the past and as this is a significant increase – the mitigation was done over 12 years – is it possible to have full market value assessments phased in over five years, respecting the hardship borne by people who already pay more for their housing?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has happened is that we have phased it in over a two-year period as opposed to having it come in all at once because we did know that the increases in some communities would be substantial. This now puts every Albertan on a level playing field. Every home of an equal value will be taxed, education taxed, at exactly the same rate, and this will go to support a wonderful education system. This is the fairest way to collect it, and it will be used for education in our province.

**Mr. Allen:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: as is done in other areas, is there any special consideration that could be made for qualifying residents in my constituency to avoid the possibility of constantly fluctuating increases for long-term and senior residents?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of what's going to mitigate fluctuations is the fact that we now fund a set percentage of the education budget through this funding. So it isn't going to just rise and fall with property values, with growth in communities; it's going to only fund a percentage of the budget for education. That will be a known amount, it'll be very easy to manage, and in the long run it will create a very stable funding source for education but also a known quantity for the municipalities and the taxpayers.

Thank you.

#### Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

*(continued)*

**Mr. Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, my question deals with the sky palace renovation. We know that there was a decision made by someone to build a PC alumni lounge, private PC elevator, and Premier's suite. We know that this renovation would have cost millions of tax dollars to design and complete, and we know that a construction company was directed to begin the build, which was later cancelled by someone although we don't know by whom given the evolving memories of the ministers involved. My question is simple. Which ministers or what governmental body, be it cabinet or Treasury Board, actually approved the initial appropriation of . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member is asking an important question. All of our things get approved by Treasury Board, but the fact is that it doesn't get approved in that detail about exactly where every piece of furniture is and exactly what's in there. Certainly, not all change orders come to Treasury Board. The fact is that the hon. member is infatuated with something that's not happening. I would agree with him on one thing – at least I think I would – that this was a bad idea. The bad idea is not happening, hon. member. You should be pleased.

2:50

**Mr. Anderson:** Given that last week the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, when questioned on whether the legal approval process was followed for the initial decision to fund sky palace, stated that the approval, quote, broke all the rules of protocol, unquote, and further, quote, if one really goes out of

their way to break the rules, they will do so, but usually the system will catch them, unquote, Premier, if this cabinet minister says that the proper rules and protocols were not followed, was the decision to initially fund the sky palace, therefore, done illegally?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that you didn't rise to admonish the hon. member for asking for a legal opinion, which, of course, I can't give. But I would say this. The Minister of Infrastructure was absolutely right. Treasury Board approves funding. It approves funding on a global basis for a building project. It doesn't go back and approve every single change order, every finite item. The hon. minister that was referred to in the question will have to speak to what he was thinking about when he said that, but the fact of the matter is that you could not get any project done if you had to do approvals on that finite basis through Treasury Board or cabinet.

**Mr. Anderson:** We're talking about millions of taxpayer dollars, Premier. Come on.

Given that this same minister, the former Deputy Premier, stated, quote, that if there are individuals that acted in any way that exceeded the authority vested in them by their office, they should be dealt with appropriately, unquote; given, Premier, that your own cabinet minister is alleging that individuals in your government exceeded their authority in this matter; and given that this means that tax money was appropriated without going through the proper legal channels, will you call on the Auditor General or the RCMP, if necessary, to conduct an independent investigation into how this misuse of tax dollars . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't here then, but the hon. member might want to check his own records. What I wasn't here for is that when the building was first approved, he might have been sitting on Treasury Board. I just don't know. I wasn't here then.

**Mr. Anderson:** Point of order.

**Mr. McIver:** I wasn't here, so I'm just asking the question.

I don't believe that anything illegal was done. I believe that the processes were followed. When there are changes, there's a protocol where different members of the administration have different levels of authority. I believe that all the rules were followed, Mr. Speaker, and a bad idea didn't happen.

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

#### Education Initiatives

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always promising to hear that a new school is being announced. As this Assembly's representative for Edmonton-South West many of my constituents and I have a vested interest in school projects. Southwest Edmonton is home to a high percentage of families with children and is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. Therefore, schools are an essential component of the local community infrastructure. The announcements were great, Minister, but Albertans are interested in the actual schools themselves. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure, plain and simple: are these new schools going to be open by 2016?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a question that I hear on a regular basis, and the answer is: we're

working very hard to make that so. We're feeling more confident all the time. I could tell you that I've met with industry members as a group in Edmonton, in Calgary, and in Banff and had other individual meetings. We're getting a great deal of co-operation from industry. I can tell you that as every week goes by, people are getting more and more optimistic that what the hon. member is asking for is going to happen. It's not going to happen by accident. It's going to take a lot of work, but we're determined to do that work because building Alberta is what Albertans want. This is part of it, and we are going to do our level best to . . .

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Education. Given that my constituents are especially interested to know whether we will still be announcing new schools in Edmonton-South West, are more schools coming, or are we calling it quits now that the 50-70 commitment has been met?

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, we're still focused on delivering what Albertans demand and want us and expect us to focus on. I can tell you that since 2010 we've opened six schools in the west, to the southwest, and created about 5,000 spaces. Of course, you know, recently we announced seven other new schools and modernizations that combined are going to add about 6,400 spaces in that area. Obviously, there are capital plans being done at school boards all across the province, and we're anxious to receive those here this spring. We'll take those forward to Treasury Board, and we'll be advocating for more schools just like this member is.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education. New schools are one thing, Minister, but the curriculum is ultimately what counts for our children. Can you tell the Assembly: through this change are we sticking with the fundamentals or not, what changes are being applied, and who is being consulted?

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I can assure parents is that their children are in a fantastic system, one of the best around the globe. As a matter of fact, one of the most recent studies that was released last week by the OECD, the PISA studies on the K to 12 systems across the globe, just confirmed that Alberta is tied for the fourth spot on the entire planet in terms of our education system. We have a great system. One of the reasons we have it is because we have ongoing continuous improvement. We want to include parents in those, but we don't want to overlook the best practices across the globe. We think parents and employers are asking for . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

#### Domestic Violence Offender Monitoring

**Mr. Saskiw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After cancelling ankle bracelets to track sex offenders and eliminating prosecution for some crimes, Albertans are sick of this Justice minister's liberal, soft-on-crime policies. They would even make Justin Trudeau blush. Last week he ended a GPS monitoring program to track criminals convicted of domestic abuse that are under court order

to stay away from the victims. This project gave victims safety and security and helped them ensure that they wouldn't be victimized again. To the Justice minister: why on earth would you end this sensible project?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit perplexed, actually, because I have already made the decision that we're going to be continuing this project for at least six months, at least until the report comes in in June, and then we can make a decision on what's best for these vulnerable women but also at the same time for the taxpayer. This decision was made much before this individual had made the question. I'm not sure why he's asking it.

**Mr. Saskiw:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that that is some interesting decision-making, here's one quote from a victim that has been impacted by your flip-flopping. This is a woman who was thrown down a set of stairs and threatened with a butcher knife that she would be killed. She said, and I quote: every day that's all I think about. Is he going to kill me today? It's a really, really scary feeling. Now no red flags will go up if he comes near my work. I'm scared to leave my office to go to my car because I don't know if he is going to come out there and hurt me. Unquote. Now, to the minister: why won't he put the victims of crime . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice puts victims of crime first today and every day. The women involved in those difficult situations have also been provided with a GPS locating beeper, again in the interests of the victim. It's time that this member stick to the facts. Alberta Justice supports victims first.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, without preamble, please.

**Mr. Saskiw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this project only costs \$450,000, which is actually about the same amount as the severance for the former Premier's chief of staff, will the minister do the right thing for once, admit that you made a brutal mistake, and reinstate the program permanently?

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, there's been no mistake made here, and there are no apologies for standing up for victims of crime, particularly women in this situation. I believe we've done the right thing, and we will take a look at the report that comes out in June. I suggest that this member get his facts straight and keep an open mind.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, your point of order was noted at 2:58. We'll deal with it at the appropriate time.

#### LGBTQ Student Supports

**Mr. Hehr:** I appreciate that our new Premier wears a Children First pin. I also appreciate that when he tabled Alberta's Education Act, it stated that all schools in this province would be subject to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act because he was putting children first. Sadly, the current Education minister did not write this into the act. To the Minister of Ed. Despite this, you have verbally stated that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act apply to all schools in this province. Can you confirm this for me today?

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I am no lawyer, but my understanding is that, of course, the Alberta Human Rights Act

and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are overriding pieces of legislation and something that guides us in everything we do.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, given that these acts apply, I was shocked to learn that Heritage Christian Academy, a fully funded public school, makes students sign a pledge that states that they will not partake in homosexual behaviour and that if they do, they will be expelled. My question is: why does the minister continue to allow schools to castigate students on the basis of their sexual orientation, which is clearly against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta Human Rights Act?

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the situation that the member is speaking of. Obviously, that's not something that we would condone in this House and on this side of the House.

3:00

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's simply unbelievable that the minister is not aware of this.

Given that this example of the Heritage Christian Academy shows that there are schools and school boards in this province that without your government's leadership will continue to not support kids who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer in our school system, accordingly will you bring in legislation that makes mandatory gay-straight alliances in schools where kids want them?

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, we want to be careful about asking for any legal opinions or perhaps anticipating a motion or a bill of yours that might be coming up later, so please be careful.

The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to respond. We're going to have a chance to debate the motion in detail coming up in the afternoon, so I'm looking forward to that.

But, you know, the allegations the member makes about school boards and about schools across the province I think are quite disparaging. We've got fantastic people all over the province as teachers in the classrooms and administrators on school boards that have the responsibility and the autonomy to deal with these things. He may want us to take that away and operate all those schools out of here, but many of those people are in a better place than I to do that, and they do a tremendous job on it on a . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

#### Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

*(continued)*

**Mr. Bilous:** Mr. Speaker, the entitlement of this government has grown so tall, it reaches the sky. Recently uncovered plans for an opulent residential penthouse include an express elevator that skips opposition floors, grooming quarters for a teenager, and a butler's pantry for continental breakfast service. To the Premier: which cabinet ministers knew about this project, and who turned a blind eye?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the project that that hon. member describes is a fiction of his imagination, and therefore nobody could have possibly known about it.

**Mr. Bilous:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the former Minister of Infrastructure said that the penthouse was cancelled November 15, 2012, and given that documents clearly show continued planning of the penthouse past that date and given that the current Minister

of Infrastructure said that it was he who cancelled the penthouse one year later, will the current Minister of Infrastructure set the record straight? Who's telling the truth: the former minister, the current minister, or neither?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, we're both telling the truth. The fact is that this isn't happening. I can't speak to what the former minister did, but this much I can tell you. If there was an order given, not everybody got the message. I can tell you that in the middle of January I had a conversation with my deputy, who was under the understanding it was to be done. I made it very clear at that point that it would not ever be done. Those are the facts of the matter. But it's also important to remember that this isn't happening. This is a bad idea that's not happening. Some might call that the process working.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Bilous:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to see those documents, Mr. Minister.

Given that the departure of the former Premier does nothing to fix the fact that this PC government has a cabinet that can't get its story straight and given that your inability to explain these contradictions goes to show that the entitlement problem runs rife through this whole government, can the Premier please explain how Albertans can trust a government that can't even answer a simple question and back it up with proof?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that none of his preamble was actually accurate, I'm not sure that there's an appropriate question to answer. But I can tell you this. This government works on behalf of Albertans every day. We care about the dollars that Albertans pay in taxes, and we will work hard to make sure that those dollars are used appropriately, and that's what these ministers did when they reviewed the project, discovered something that they believed was not in the best interests of Albertans, and cancelled it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lethbridge-East.

#### Pembina Institute Funding

**Mr. Hale:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned the PC government is funding the Pembina Institute, an antipipeline group trying to block the Keystone, Northern Gateway, and Energy East pipeline deals from going through. To the Minister of Culture. Pembina funding is coming from your ministry. Does your ministry support these much-needed pipeline projects, and if so, then why fund a group that's actively trying to stop them?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Culture funds many different organizations, including the ones that are nonprofits and support work that goes on in Alberta. The Pembina Institute has been funded in a number of different areas. The nonprofit sector is very, very important to the government of Alberta. We will continue to support projects that support Alberta and do great work.

**Mr. Hale:** They're trying to stop what's going to help Alberta.

Considering that this PC government has spent millions of taxpayer dollars on pipeline advertising and travel expenses and given that the Minister of Culture has previously funded two anti-oil documentaries and since she has now taken money away from

community grants to give to anti-oil groups, does the minister understand that her decisions have put Keystone and other projects like it at risk, or does she not care?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Culture.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the ongoing discussions on the importance of the Keystone pipeline are very important to Alberta in terms of expanding our markets and selling our products.

With respect to how individual projects or themes are funded in the Department of Culture, it's not my job as minister to judge. We support the projects when they meet the requirements, and then they are funded accordingly.

**Mr. Hale:** Hmm. Not her job to look at that.

Given that we need and support all major pipelines to increase market access and given that numerous pipeline projects such as Keystone, Energy East, and Northern Gateway currently hang in the balance, will the Minister of Energy commit that no more taxpayer dollars will be taken away from communities in order to fund antipipeline groups who put our energy future at risk?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Part of the work that the Pembina Institute and others have done that has been funded by different departments in government is to look at some of the work with regard to CCS, an important part for us with reductions through our climate change strategy and our policies. Over 70 per cent of our reductions will be coming through CCS, so important when we look at different companies and different not-for-profits. When we look at the ones from Norway and different ones and the studies that have been done by a five-group consortium of ENGOs globally looking at CCS and at "How do we overcome that technology?" that's an important piece for us.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

### Avalanche Safety

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start by expressing my condolences to the family and friends of Wade Galloway, a recently first-time elected member to our city council who was lost as the result of an avalanche. He was an exceptional member of the Lethbridge community, and this tragedy has resonated throughout our city. Therefore, the question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Can you explain what is being done to monitor snowpack conditions and warn of potential dangers and the necessary precautions that should be followed?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd certainly like to echo the comments of the hon. member, not just for the family of Mr. Galloway but to the families and friends of others who have either lost lives or suffered injury in what has been a particularly tragic year this past winter.

Alberta Parks operates a series of remote monitoring stations throughout Kananaskis Country, throughout the backcountry, that gives us regular information on the condition of the snowpack. That information is then transmitted to the Canadian Avalanche

Centre, and that information is then used to inform the public as to the changing conditions of the snowpack in the backcountry.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what kind of capacity does our government have to respond in the event of an avalanche, not by passing it on but as the government itself?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. In fact, Alberta Parks employs public safety officers in all of our parks, and they've been, unfortunately, rather busy this past winter. In fact, in many situations they are the first responders on site, and they often assist emergency personnel to attempt the rescue or the recovery of people who've been caught in avalanches. They've been, as I say, very busy, and they've worked co-operatively throughout that period of time to provide the necessary services to visitors to the backcountry, to Kananaskis Country in particular.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. It is along the same lines as the answer. How can the ministry help proactively to educate the general public, municipalities, and tourist operators about the dangers of avalanches?

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. Certainly, education and public information are essential in order to provide the general public with as much information in their hands as possible so they can then access and use the backcountry as safely as possible. Again, through our co-operative work with the Canadian Avalanche Centre we provide information to the general public through regular avalanche bulletins and through traditional as well as social media up-to-date, real-time information as to the changing condition of the snowpack so that those venturing into the backcountry, into areas where avalanche danger could exist, can access that area as safely as humanly possible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### 3:10 Travel Alberta Executive Expenses

**Mr. Strankman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a job posting came online at Tourism Alberta for a new associate deputy minister, just two days after the Wildrose questioned this PC minister for allowing a culture of entitlement to prevail in his department. This job posting replaces an associate deputy minister who attended a \$2,000 dinner and, plus, had a \$290 alcohol tab. Was the ADM fired for inappropriate behaviour?

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, currently in our department we have a number of changes that are going on, and unfortunately we've lost a long-term associate deputy minister who has been with us for many years, and we're currently in the process of replacing that individual. I will tell you that that particular individual provided the public with outstanding service over a prolonged period in the public service, and the people of Alberta are very fortunate to have had his dedication working on a number of projects, not just in the Department of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation but elsewhere within the public service.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Strankman:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister said three weeks ago in this House that he was reviewing the expenses that he and his staff should have reviewed in the first place, when will the minister table his review and his actions in this House?

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I stated a few weeks ago, I instructed Travel Alberta to undertake a complete and independent third-party review. I expect that review to be complete, to be thorough, to look into all instances of expense claims, and to determine whether, in fact, correct procedures were followed. That review is under way. Travel Alberta will have that review and will have to review that review, and then they will have a discussion with me with regard to their future actions and any remedial actions should that be proven necessary.

**Mr. Strankman:** Review a review: that's an interesting concept.

Given that it does not take much time to figure out what are inappropriate expenses – like \$150 tuxedo rentals, \$99 steaks, bucket-list restaurants, and a \$90 bottle of Cabernet – and given that the Wildrose has done the minister's job in pointing out these inappropriate expenses, will this minister commit today to make that review public and curb this PC culture of entitlement?

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what I have committed to and will continue to commit to is that Travel Alberta will continue to do the outstanding work on behalf of Albertans in promoting Alberta as an outstanding tourism destination and that we will have the review in our hands in short course. But Travel Alberta needs to do the full discussion of the results of that review, and they will do that. It will happen in the due course of time. I'm not going to rush that review because I expect it to be done properly and in the full course of time.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Little Bow.

### **Builders' Liens**

**Mr. Quadri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. The Builders' Lien Act lets a contractor put a lien on the property when the money has not been paid, but what's actually happening is that the homeowners are being held hostage in the dispute between a contractor and a subcontractor. Why does government allow this to happen?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member because he comes to my office regularly advocating for his constituents and some of the challenges that they have. We've discussed this before. It's important through this process that all parties, whether it's the homeowners, whether it's the builders, the contractors, the suppliers, have the ability to protect themselves when they're building a home and they're owed money. The Builders' Lien Act itself tries to balance protection between those parties, anybody who would have an interest and a claim in the party. Contractors have to follow up when they institute a lien. If they don't take court action, then the lien expires in 180 days.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.  
First supplemental.

**Mr. Quadri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some of my constituents from Edmonton-Mill Woods are asking me: how does the Builders' Lien Act help protect homeowners?

**Mr. Griffiths:** Mr. Speaker, the Builders' Lien Act protects homeowners in many different ways. First, the act allows homeowners to hold back a portion of the money owed so that they could set a lien in a case where there's a lien against the property. That's the first case. In the vast majority of cases, when a lien is issued against a property, it expires within 180 days if court action isn't taken, and then the homeowner can have it removed. They can also instigate a court action that says that action has to be taken within 30 days. If action isn't taken on a lien on a property, then that could be removed. Finally, Service Alberta also provides investigation services to make sure that false liens and violators are prosecuted.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Quadri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: how can homeowners protect themselves from contractors who are trying to get some extra money from them by putting a lien on the property?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the most important way for homeowners to protect themselves is to have a contract signed. When they have a contract signed, which they can rely on then, it makes sure that costs cannot increase by more than 10 per cent, to a maximum of \$100, on any contract that's issued on what the estimates are going to be. If anyone does, it would have to be with the agreement of the homeowner. And if anyone tries to do something like that, above and beyond what the legislation says, then we can investigate and issue a fine of up to \$300,000 and two years in jail for anyone that would violate those liens. Homeowners are very well protected in this province.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. members.

Airdrie, your point of order has been withdrawn at your request.

### **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** We'll start with Calgary-Currie, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### **Emergency Housing for Women**

**Ms Cusanelli:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to once again announce that I will be spending the night at the YWCA's annual Keep a Roof over Their Heads event on May 1 this year. I speak today to encourage people to donate to this worthy cause or join me in seeing one night through the eyes of a homeless woman.

Imagine this. What would you choose if you had to decide between keeping a roof over your head or paying your heating bill?

**Mr. Anderson:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms Cusanelli:** What would you choose if you had to decide between keeping a roof over your head and warm winter clothing for your children? What would you choose if you had to pick between a roof over your head or walking on eggshells awaiting the next domestic altercation? If you would choose leaving for a better life, what necessary belongings would you fit in your purse

or a small bag, knowing you have nowhere to keep these items completely safe? This is the reality for many women in Calgary and elsewhere, who even with a good job cannot find affordable housing.

The YWCA's winter emergency response program provides emergency overnight shelter for up to 50 women per evening throughout the winter months in Calgary. Women can self refer, and their urgent needs, from basic clothing to hygiene and first aid, are addressed. Many of these women are called the "hidden homeless" because you won't see them sleeping on the streets. It's not safe. Women at risk can become victims of violent crimes, including sexual assault. Many women will return to an abusive relationship, couch surf, sleep in their car, sleep in a church basement, or stay with family in an overcrowded house.

The YWCA will need to raise \$4 million this year to keep a roof over the heads of these homeless women. For those who will donate, your funds will help the YWCA keep the lights on and the clients safe and warm. Your funds will provide immediate care kits for women upon their arrival, which includes food and toiletries. Your funds *support on-site counselling, referrals, and advocacy in an environment that promotes positive change. Make a difference by visiting [www.ywcakeeperoof.com](http://www.ywcakeeperoof.com).*\*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member. Regretfully, the time has passed on. I have no choice but to stop members when the two minutes are up, and we're trying to be more consistent in that way.

Also, I was asked to forgo the 30-second departure for washroom breaks rule to speed things up, so let's do that.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, were you serious about a point of order? We don't normally do points of order during private members' statements.

**Mr. Anderson:** No. It's after.

**The Speaker:** It was after? I heard you during.

**Mr. Anderson:** It was heard from him during the member's statement.

**The Speaker:** There either is a point of order on someone else or . . .

**Mr. Anderson:** There is a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Is there one?

**Mr. Anderson:** On Mr. McIver.

**The Speaker:** All right. It's been noted, and we'll look forward to hearing the arguments for it.

Cypress-Medicine Hat, you'll be next, followed by Red Deer-North.

### Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

**Mr. Barnes:** A few years ago the government decided that their PC MLAs should have new office space and that those luxury offices should be built on the dime of the hard-working taxpayer. Fast-forward to now, and the project has grown and grown and grown. They're drowning Albertans in debt and interest payments, but office space is somehow still a priority for them. Mr. Speaker, when you take cost overruns, project add-ons, and incompetent oversight, and you put them all together, you get a renovation that now comes in at a staggering \$400 million.

Sadly, this wasn't even the worst story to come out of the federal building. We just found out that the former Premier's

executive assistant personally meddled with project plans and demanded that builders include a luxury suite for the Premier, a private elevator, and a PC MLA alumni lounge. Albertans wouldn't even dream of the day when they could plan their own multimillion-dollar living space or build themselves a rooftop garden for cocktail parties or host friends in a private theatre. But for this government approving a PC palace in the sky is just business as usual in the building Alberta plan.

3:20

The Minister of Infrastructure and the previous one have been talking out of both sides of their mouths. Before they were being loyal foot soldiers and proudly trumpeting the PC messaging. Now they're backtracking, and both are trying to claim credit for stopping the plans. It's time for them to step up, claim responsibility, and apologize to taxpayers for putting themselves first.

This is a testament to the size and power of government here in Alberta. The web of government scope and authority becomes larger and more tangled with each budget that passes, and projects like the sky palace will start going unnoticed as accountability and transparency continue to disappear. Mr. Speaker, the Infrastructure ministers, the former Premier, and the whole cabinet owe taxpayers an apology for the sky palace and the \$400 million.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### Red Deer College Athletic Achievements

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the city of Red Deer has always been very proud of Red Deer College and its academic and athletic accomplishments. This year Red Deer College made national history by winning Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association national titles in both men's and women's volleyball and a national team championship gold medal in women's curling. That is three national titles in one year. Red Deer College also received a national silver medal in men's basketball and seven Alberta college provincial championships.

Red Deer College also celebrates the fact that 97 student athletes achieved academic excellence with a GPA of 3.0. There are more than 175 student athletes who compete in seven sports on 15 teams. The Red Deer College Kings and Queens have demonstrated throughout this historic season their determination, skills, and leadership. Four of their coaches have been recognized for excellence provincially and nationally. Not only are they part of an athletic dynasty; they are also volunteers, coaches, and mentors in our community, giving back whenever possible.

To quote from Red Deer College president and CEO Joel Ward: "The unparalleled achievements of our student athletes this year serve as the exclamation point to our remarkable 50-year history. We have a lot to be proud of at RDC, and our student athletes shouted that message to the nation this year. We're excited to celebrate these accomplishments as we reflect on the storybook season where our student athletes, coaches, and trainers have exhibited the drive and dedication that has defined the spirit of our learners, our college, and our community for decades."

Please join me in congratulating Red Deer College and their student athletes who became a part of Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association history by winning three national titles this year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

### Volunteers

**Ms L. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 6 to 12 is National Volunteer Week. It is a time to pay tribute to and reflect on the immense contributions that volunteers, our everyday heroes, are making in communities. Generous and compassionate volunteers deliver vital programs and services in all corners of Alberta, contributing an estimated \$9.6 billion in revenue to our economy each year. Because of the efforts of volunteers, Albertans of all ages are able to develop their creative and athletic talents, expand the scope of their education, and be inspired to step forward themselves as volunteers.

Volunteers are in hospitals, libraries, and hockey rinks. They are helping to fight fires and deadly diseases. Seniors are supported by volunteers, and seniors are volunteers. Volunteers are providing support to families devastated by flood waters and other natural disasters. They are building Alberta communities for the future by helping preserve its past. Volunteers are our friends, our neighbours, our everyday heroes, and they touch the lives of every single Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is proud to support our volunteers with programs and direct funding and by recognizing their outstanding contributions with the annual stars of Alberta volunteer awards. Also, this year the government will be joining with Volunteer Alberta in the launch of Volunteerville, an online community where Albertans can share their own experiences as volunteers. I encourage all Albertans to visit this website at Volunteer Alberta.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the Legislature I'm especially proud to say thank you to the amazing Albertans that are building this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

### Earthquake in Chile

**Mr. Quadri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to bring attention to a natural disaster which has directly impacted some of my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods. As the people of Alberta know first-hand from last summer, nature can be a very devastating force. On Tuesday, April 1, an 8.2 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Chile. This earthquake was the largest in the region since the devastating 8.8 magnitude earthquake in 2010, which killed over 500 people.

Fortunately, the Chilean government took action after the 2010 earthquake and put in place measures such as earthquake-resistant buildings and the improved warning system to reduce the cost of human life. These measures were largely successful; however, sadly, seven people lost their lives in the earthquake. Nearly 928,000 people had to be evacuated, and more than 2,600 homes were seriously damaged.

Alberta is home to over 6,000 people of Chilean descent. My riding of Edmonton-Mill Woods has the highest Chilean population of any constituency in Alberta. They are very active in my constituency and help to ensure that Mill Woods remains a vibrant multicultural community. I would like to especially recognize a few members of the board of directors from the Chilean Canadian Cultural Society's Edmonton chapter who are sitting in the public gallery today. Joining us are Sandra Azocar, Lito Azocar, Boris Contreras, and Degalio Henriquez.

The Chilean people have shown the strength in their character and resolve in rebuilding from the previous earthquake, and I am

sure this time will be no different. My thoughts and prayers are with the people of Chile as they go through this rebuilding effort, and my condolences go out to those families who have lost their loved ones in this tragedy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

### LGBTQ Student Supports

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and a privilege to talk today about my motion. Today, hon. members, we are faced with the choice between taking action to counter homophobic bullying in our schools or doing nothing, a choice between making things better today or paying lip service that things will get better someday. Today we can choose to make life better for kids by supporting Motion 503, which will mandate that gay-straight alliances be supported in all schools where kids want them.

Our education system is comprised of public, private, Catholic, and charter schools where children are subjected to horrific abuse simply because of who they are. The abuse faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students is not justifiable in any school, and something must be done. The research regarding solutions is clear. When students are permitted to form gay-straight alliances and create a safe space for themselves, bullying and suicide attempts are reduced. This is not limited to LGBT students but extends to all students.

Sadly, although no one can deny the problem of homophobic bullying, there appears not to be the will to do anything about it. Hiding behind excuses like school board autonomy or the notion that preventing discrimination somehow violates religious liberty, the government seems content to do nothing. Given that this government has accepted that gay-straight alliances reduce bullying, I cannot understand why they will not legislate that GSAs be made mandatory in schools where kids want them when they know that some school administrators or boards will not be proactive in implementing these clubs, despite their success rate, because of redundant arguments that have no place in today's Alberta.

Hon. members, this afternoon we have a choice. Our actions could directly make things better for kids forever in this province if only we have the courage to make things better today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I understand you have four or five.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Five. That's correct.

**The Speaker:** Proceed, please.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I do have five items to table today, all of which I have quoted from in my speech for second reading of Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. The first document is entitled Visual Impediments to Learning. It's a document written by Dr. Noella Piquette and Dr. Charles Boulet. I have quoted from this document, in particular the statement that says that it violates the human rights of children not to maintain their eye health.

**3:30**

The second document is a letter from John McDonald, the executive director and regional vice-president of CNIB Alberta and Northwest Territories, that states that the CNIB is very supportive of the intent of Bill 203.

The third document is from the eye physicians and surgeons who support enhanced vision screening designed to capture and treat eye health problems in as many affected children as possible.

The fourth document is a letter from Dr. Gordon Hensel, the registrar for the Alberta College of Optometrists, that has provided suggested amendments to Bill 203 and clearly states that they support comprehensive eye examinations for all children on a regular basis by a doctor of optometry or an ophthalmologist.

The fifth tabling is from the Alberta Association of Optometrists, that congratulates me for introducing Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, and it provides seven recommendations for amendments to make the bill stronger. Mr. Speaker, I will be implementing those seven recommendations.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations – I understand you have two to present – followed by the Minister of Justice.

**Mr. Oberle:** I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's my honour to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2013 annual report of the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. I want to thank the chair, Mr. Don Cunningham, and through him all the members of the appeal tribunal for the good work that they do on behalf of Albertans.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it is my very deep honour today to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of the Expression of Reconciliation for the Legacy of the Indian Residential School System that our Premier spoke about. In fact, our Premier tabled it in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, deposited it in the box for that purpose. It was an amazing weekend, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. It was a life-changing experience. Now we can all hope that it actually changes lives going forward.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice – I understand you have two presentations – followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Denis:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have two tablings. I'd first like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Law Enforcement Review Board's annual report for 2012. The Law Enforcement Review Board is part of our common-sense, conservative justice system. It is an independent body and is an appeal body for public complaints concerning police officer conduct. The board also hears appeals from police officers who have been the subject of discipline arising from a complaint and peace officers who have had their appointments cancelled. I'll pass five copies to the page.

As well, Mr. Speaker, today I'm tabling five copies of the victims' services status report for 2012-2013. Alberta Justice puts victims first. In 2012-2013 more than \$17 million in financial benefits were provided to eligible victims of crime. Approximately \$11.7 million in grant funding was provided to organizations that assist victims of crime. These programs provided services to more than 67,000 Albertans, 16 per cent of them aiding victims under the age of 18. More than 3,500 volunteer advocates, board members, and special-purpose

volunteers contributed 214,092 volunteer hours in this year's cycle to support victims of crime in Alberta.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Calder I'd like to table 50 of over 4,000 postcards that our office has received asking this PC government to restore consistent and reliable funding to postsecondary education in Alberta. The postcards, collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta, are clear evidence the government is, unfortunately, not listening to the demands of Albertans for a well-funded postsecondary system that is both accessible and affordable for all.

Mr. Speaker, as evidence of the value of a good education let me just say now that I look forward to being able to vote in favour of Motion 503.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a document that I referenced in question period from the Heritage Christian Academy that clearly states that students are to sign this to be part of the school. It states, "I will also refrain from a lifestyle of sexual immorality (pre-marital sex, homosexual behaviour, viewing of pornography, etc)," or else they will be expelled. I am tabling that with all five copies. They are a fully funded public school in this province.

I also have a research report out of the University of Victoria called School-Based Strategies to Reduce Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Attempts, and Discrimination Among Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Adolescents in Western Canada. The document clearly shows that the establishment of GSAs reduces stigma amongst LGBTQ students and leads to lower suicide rates, so it highlights the importance there.

Here's a copy of an e-mail sent by Rob Wells, co-chair of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church Affirming Committee, supporting Motion 503; an article from the Calgary *Metro*, which shows Calgary high schools and junior highs are in support of LGBT clubs.

One final document is a fabulous, actually, opinion editorial written in the *Calgary Herald* by Dr. Kristopher Wells, whom I introduced earlier, and really I urge all members of the Assembly to, hopefully, review it, hopefully, before voting in favour of Motion 503, because it really explains the issue in great detail.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Edmonton-Centre, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three sets of tablings. The first is a copy of a board of directors meeting for Legal Aid Alberta, in which they note from a meeting with the Minister of Justice that they were asked to present options for reducing programs and spending for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

The second set of tablings is a form letter that a number of different people sent in to me. This particular letter is urging government to stop their attack on public-sector pensions. Copies of this were signed by Alexandra Hope, Mary Cornet, and Melissa McCarthy.

The final two are, again, a form letter noting that “it is impossible for me to reconcile the unilateral demand to reduce the benefits of my pension after Jan. 1, 2016, with the stated value of my work to the province.” These letters have been signed by Robin Charlesworth and Laurie Fisher.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Hale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a column from the *Edmonton Journal* titled Energy East Pipeline Plan Worse than Keystone, Pembina Institute Says. It’s some information that I referred to in my question today.

The second tabling is a news release from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation showing that in the last five years \$88,381.68 was taken from the community spirit grant donation to pay to Pembina.

Thank you.

#### Point of Order Remarks Off the Record

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we’re now at points of order. I believe, although it’s uncharacteristic and we don’t normally allow it, a point of order was raised during the delivery being given by Calgary-Currie, and the point of order request was delivered by Airdrie. I don’t know what it’s about, so if you could please elucidate and also give us your citation, we might hear it.

**Mr. Anderson:** Sure. It’s referring to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically regarding allegations made against another member or saying things that will disrupt or likely bring disorder to the House. During the member’s statement in question the Minister of Infrastructure reiterated a comment that he had made during question period but reiterated it over here again. He had made an accusation that I had some role in the approval of the federal building.

**An Hon. Member:** The sky palace.

**Mr. Anderson:** The sky palace or the federal building or both. Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, I was not on Treasury Board when that decision was made, and I’ve been a vocal opponent of the building, one of the reasons – certainly, I’ve said it many times. After I left the PC caucus, I cited it as a reason for leaving the PC caucus, one of many. I would ask that he withdraw that remark, that I was on Treasury Board when the decision was made. It’s factually incorrect.

Thank you.

3:40

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. members, this is a very unusual situation. I heard none of it. *Hansard* hasn’t captured any of it. But if there’s any truth to it, could I ask somebody here, the Minister of Infrastructure?

**Mr. McIver:** There’s no truth to it.

**The Speaker:** Well, then, let’s hear the explanation. The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Campbell:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, as you said, *Hansard* doesn’t pick this up. I mean, this was banter back and forth between two members across the floor, which you’ve admonished us about in the past. The fact that they’re talking back and forth when the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was giving her very

important member’s statement: I think they both should get up and apologize, and I think we just get on with business.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, both of you have had a chance to get something on the record that you wanted. It might be a point of clarification. I don’t know. But, in any case, it’s not a point of order, and we’re going to move on.

#### Statement by the Speaker

##### Speaking Time

**The Speaker:** Let me just ask you, now that you’re back after two weeks of working in your own constituencies, to please curtail things like chattering across the bow. It only leads to disruption and disorder, those kinds of interjections. They float both ways.

Secondly, I find it particularly impolite during a private member’s statement that people would be whispering, talking, or talking across the bow. I know how the bait-and-trap game works. I’ve seen it; I’ve been part of it. It’s not a nice thing to be trapped that way. So I would ask you to please stop that.

Thirdly, to those of you who’ve written to me asking about why some members were allowed to go longer than normal during the comments pertaining to the ministerial statement and the responses from the opposition as well as requests from a couple of private members, please know that there are guidelines that I will enunciate for you more clearly tomorrow in that respect. But there is a convention that says that normally a ministerial statement shouldn’t take more than about five minutes. It’s up to the discretion of the minister or in this case today of the Premier. Similarly, there is a certain discretion with regard to the opposition leader’s response. Typically an opposition leader has by convention approximately three minutes. I let both of them go over their time limits today because of conventions to that extent in the past.

Then we had the opposition Liberal leader speak, and then we had the opposition New Democrat leader speak, and then three private members spoke. One of them happened to be a victim of the issue being talked about. I hope you would show some respect for the chair when rulings like that have to be made to allow people to speak a little bit longer. That knife slices both ways, and I was fair to all.

However, when it comes to private members’ statements, you have a very specific rule that says, under section 7(4), “When Members’ Statements is called, up to 6 Members other than members of the Executive Council may make a statement, each statement to be no more than 2 minutes in duration.” I have reminded you before, and I’m going to remind some of you again. Know the rules because you’re going to be expected to abide by them. They apply as fairly as I can possibly implement them to all of you. I don’t pick favourites. When you walk through those doors, you’re all the same to the Speaker or whoever is in the chair. Some days are much more difficult than others, as you have seen and as you all know. I don’t appreciate comments coming to the contrary, indicating that somebody sitting in my position, be it me or someone else, is showing favouritism. That is not the case, hon. members. And if any of you want to come and discuss it with me further, I’d be happy to show you examples and to chat about it further. You have responsibilities; that includes knowing the rules. So, please, let’s try to abide more by them.

Now, one of the rules says that in order to revert to Introduction of Guests, we require unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** So let us go to Red Deer-North for your introduction.

### Introduction of Guests

*(continued)*

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this House Dr. Charles Boulet, who is an optometrist and the co-author of the document that I tabled today entitled Visual Impediments to Learning – he's here to support Bill 203 – and also Mr. Brian Wik, the executive director of the Alberta Association of Optometrists. They're in the public gallery, and they're here to hear the debate in second reading on Bill 203, Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### Orders of the Day

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

##### Bill 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I would like to acknowledge and welcome our guests, many of whom I have previously introduced and are seated in the galleries, to hear the second reading of Bill 203.

Vision is the most important perceptual element in the classroom but the first one we ignore. It costs us all but families most. Of the children who are affected, some will be at a point where minimal clinical help will make an important difference in how they perform and feel. By not correcting vision issues early, we are subjecting families to years of unnecessary assessments and interventions where often simple, comprehensive vision management is all that is required. This is not to mention the high costs to school boards and health, justice, and social services if vision problems go undetected.

Bill 203 would ensure that children of school age are prepared to learn by requiring a comprehensive vision assessment for grade 1 at the very latest. This will help reduce behavioural problems that affect children with vision impediments and impairments. Not only would it save children with visual challenges from anxiety and stress but likewise for teachers and families.

Bill 203 requires a proof of examination form. As a reminder, no legislation can impede access to education. Bill 203 has the opposite effect. It will enable successful access to education for all children, especially those with visual impediments. Ensuring that eye examinations are complete prior to reading age would enable educators and doctors to rule out early eyesight problems as impediments to learning or reading. Optometry and ophthalmology leaders in child vision care have both officially endorsed this bill with the understanding that some revisions of the text be considered to clarify and strengthen the bill. The Alberta Association of Optometrists, the College of Optometrists, the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta, and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society have all provided meaningful input with suggestions for near and long-term management of

service and costs. Their letters were tabled today. Mr. Speaker, I have acknowledged their concerns, and I fully intend to implement their recommendations for amendments in Committee of the Whole.

I have heard numerous personal stories from adults who were amazed to find that many of their problems in school were created by poor eyesight and that a simple eye examination that they received in grade 4 or as an adult helped to solve many of their problems. They expressed sadness that the visual problem was not discovered sooner, and they were all enthusiastically supportive of Bill 203.

Thanks to the work of initiatives like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program more children are getting their eyes examined; however, still more than 60 per cent of children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam. Vision, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely critical to the success of our young students.

Legislators and educators in American jurisdictions have recognized that conditions such as amblyopia, that has no obvious structural causes and is the leading cause of monocular blindness, need to be detected at an early age. Throughout the U.S. 43 of 50 states have either state policy, codes, statutes, regulations, or local school board requirements regarding vision screening and tests.

Mr. Speaker, vision health has always been important to me. As a legislator in this Assembly I have raised the issues of screening for children during question period debate as well as with my previous private member's bill. I truly believe that children need to be able to read in order to succeed.

I'm very impressed with the work done by Dr. Charles Boulet and Dr. Noella Piquette of the University of Lethbridge. Their work highlighted the idea that if there is an error in or an impediment to sensory perception, higher cognitive function such as reading, memory, emotional awareness, and impulse control can be affected. In schools functional defects of the vision-related process impair reading and learning and as a result influence other behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, as part of my work in the preparation of Bill 203 I reached out to both the Alberta Association of Optometrists and the Alberta College of Optometrists. After introducing Bill 203 in this House, I have received ongoing and valuable feedback from both organizations. I very much appreciate the co-operation I have received from the AAO and the ACO throughout this process as both organizations stress the importance of early childhood vision assessments in order to ensure the health of children's eyes. If this bill successfully proceeds through second reading to Committee of the Whole debate, I will make amendments to the bill to address their concerns.

**3:50**

Here in Alberta we are fortunate enough to have vision examinations covered by Alberta Health for children until their 18th birthday. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program is also funded through Alberta Health.

I quote from a letter from the Alberta Association of Optometrists that I tabled today.

The Alberta Association [of Optometrists] would like to congratulate you on introducing Private Members Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, in the Alberta Legislature on March 13, 2014. We commend you for introducing a Bill that recognizes the importance of children receiving a comprehensive eye exam in this province.

There are seven items we would like to bring to your attention that would strengthen Bill 203.

Mr. Speaker, I fully intend to make these seven changes as requested by the Alberta Association of Optometrists, that are the same changes that the Alberta College of Optometrists has

requested. I ask for the support of all members so that we can move this forward to make these changes and not disappoint any children that need our help.

I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on this topic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 203.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Now let's go to Calgary-Fish Creek, please.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I want to start off by thanking all of the people who've taken the time to call me and actually have meetings with me. The member has introduced some of the people up in the gallery from the CNIB, and I've had the pleasure of meeting them on another occasion. When we talked about the service dog legislation, then I talked to them about Bill 203.

I have to tell you that I'm struggling with Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, and I'm struggling with it for several reasons. The member sent a note across asking me if I would be supporting the bill, and I said that at this particular time I'm not sure. We've got a couple of speakers lined up, and the nice thing about sitting in this Legislature is democracy, and you have the opportunity to listen to the debate.

The member referred to the Alberta Association of Optometrists, and I met with them. She brought up the fact that they've asked for seven different amendments. I guess I am perplexed by the fact that – I know this member. I know how diligently – and she's been around this Legislature for a long time. This is the second attempt at this particular bill. She brought forward the Irlen bill last session. I guess I'm just struggling with the fact that she wouldn't reach out to these different associations and talk to them in regard to the bill and what they liked about the bill. She and I were together as PCs, and we both had the experience of winning on private members' bills and getting them through the Legislature. I think we can attribute that to the fact that we went through a great deal of consulting with people on the front line.

I had looked at her bill, and, you know, under the definitions and things, under (d), she talks about the visual assessment. I'm sure if she gets this through second reading, she's going to talk about the concern that the College of Optometrists has in regard to the term "visual assessments," when they want the bill talking about a comprehensive eye exam as per the Health Professions Act.

Under visual assessment she's also talking about how "every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year." We all know in the Legislature the difference between must and may. "Must" is one of the strong words in this Legislature that I learned when I was on the side of the government on leg. review. It's one of the words that the Legislature doesn't take lightly because must means you must do it.

The next one goes, "a parent or guardian must provide to the school which his or her child attends a form signed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist indicating that the child has received a visual assessment." We've got must again. We've got the term "visual assessment." My question to the member is: what if they don't? What happens if they don't?

The third one is: "a visual assessment performed for the purposes of this section must not have occurred more than one year prior to the submission of the form under subsection (2)."

Then it goes on to (4), "when a student is enrolling in a school after grade 1 and has not previously attended a school in Alberta, a parent or guardian must comply with subsection (2) as if the student was entering grade 1." There we go with must, and it goes on.

What I found very interesting when I met with the College of Optometrists is this little brochure and a little package, actually, that goes out to every child in kindergarten. In this particular brochure is Fribbit, which I was told about by the College of Optometrists, that I introduced when I was the minister of children's services. Then they were kind enough to send a picture of Fribbit and me, which I don't know is so kind when it shows you aged from 10 years earlier. Anyhow, it talks about all of the things they recommend that can point to visual problems. It talks about the fact that eye exams are free, and it encourages parents at this particular – how well can your kindergartener see? It's kindergarten teacher program information, and it's quite successful. You know, I think when you see this all given out to – and it's a very, very nice package about how Fribbit goes to school and how children learn and how they see. There's a little cartoon that everybody can figure out about seeing.

I asked the College of Optometrists when my kids were in school – actually, my younger son was one of those children that ended up with eye surgeries and the patch on the eye and the big, thick glasses – and we talked about a lazy eye. They were kind enough at the time to say: there are lazy eyes, and then there are lazy eyes. You can have a child that was very prominent, like my little guy was with his eye turned in, but there are lazy eyes where you can't see anything. They even said that they have had children enter school that are blind and picked up at that particular time by a teacher, the old squinting at the board and things like that.

I guess the comments that are pressing to me are that we're at second reading of a bill, and we're talking about passing the intent of the bill. If we were to look at just passing the intent of the bill without talking about all of the amendments that are recommended by the College of Optometrists, and then – I didn't hear the member talk about the letters we've received from the department of ophthalmology and the huge concerns that they have on this particular bill. Then the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta: some of the things that they're very concerned about on this bill are some of the things that aren't answered in the intent of the second reading. While I support what the member is trying to do, and that's trying to make sure that every child in this province, in Alberta, has an eye examination – under the optometrists that's a comprehensive eye examination – why weren't we consulted previously so that we could have the intent of the bill done very factually?

The other thing I'm concerned about is cost. It's not costs related to care – and I've learned that, quite frankly, as the Health critic over the last four years – but the costs associated, the costs that we've found out. The uptake to have every child in this province will be an additional \$2.4 million. Small peanuts. Honestly, small peanuts in a huge budget that health care has at a cost saving. The problem is that I just went through estimates. I'd like to know from the Health minister if he supports this bill and where in the budget this is going to come from.

I've had all sorts of calls on this particular bill in regard to visual assessments. What about learning disabilities, all of the things that can stop our children from learning? Again, I sent an e-mail to the member, and I asked her these particular questions. Has she got the support of the Minister of Education? Has she got the support of the Minister of Health? Even though we're talking about a very small uptake of about \$2.4 million, I can tell you, as the Health critic – is the minister going to say: "Yes, it's a

budgetary item. I'm going to get rid of 70 of the bureaucrats that are currently in Alberta Health Services that would add up to that \$2.4 million so that we can make sure that every child in this province has a must?"

Member, I'd like to know what your reaction is from, actually, education. What has the Alberta School Boards Association said? Who's going to track these children? Who's going to take care of it? The Education critic may want to add to that. I haven't specifically talked to either the Calgary board of education or the separate board of education. You as the critic may be able to say what they've told us and that they've got a plan in place so that they can make sure of every child.

4:00

I guess the comments in regard to the ophthalmology department: how are you going to address that and, quite frankly, the Eye Physicians and Surgeons Association of Alberta? How are you going to address some of the things that the department of ophthalmology has said in their bill and some of their concerns that I think really need to be addressed? Can we in Committee of the Whole address all of these by putting – we were already talking about optometrists for seven amendments. Are we going to have a bill that's got 15 amendments? Do we even suggest, yet again, that we send this bill back to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities? We did that last year, were tied up for nine months on that bill.

I know the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and myself have written the new committee chair, yet again, asking: when are we going to get on to the priorities of the standing committee, which are mental health and addictions?

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, we're going to go to a member from the Liberal opposition, followed by a member of the ND opposition, followed by the Minister of Education, and then we'll alternate back and forth.

Let us go with Edmonton-Centre, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me to speak in favour of Bill 203. This is a really interesting lesson for everybody here about trying to change the world by trying to change public policy. I mean, that's why I came to this Assembly, and I've been able to change the world by changing public policy, but frankly it isn't easy. You're not only trying to fight people from the outside that are inclined to be against something – and I'm not speaking specifically to this bill at this point – but often you're fighting your colleagues in the House, and that's a little bit of what I'm seeing here.

We have the Member for Red Deer-North who has been steadily advancing eye health for children. She's right. She has asked questions in question period, she was championing the Irlen syndrome bill previously, and now she has this bill. When you're trying to create a bill, Mr. Speaker, you're going: "Okay. Should I lay it all out there? Should I have the whole buffet in there, every little bit and piece possible and the pasta salad and the Greek salad and everything that anybody would want to see in here?" Then everybody has got a lot more to complain about and pick apart. Or do I just take the essence of it and say: "This is it; one little plate, that's what we're going to work with"? And if we agree on the principle of that, then we will move forward and make such adjustment as you really need to make to have the bill be successful.

I had a conversation with someone from the CNIB the other day and was just saying: "You know, there are so many people that

have got a spoon in on this one. It's like writing a question by committee." Anyone on the opposition side and other people that are not in Executive Council will know what I'm talking about, when everybody has a brilliant idea about the phrase you should use in your question or who you should reference or blah, blah, blah. All you want to do is ask a straightforward question. You know, thanks for all the help, but I've just got to get this one done. I would say that what the Member for Red Deer-North has done with Bill 203 is to give us the one clear plate, not the whole buffet, saying that this is what we're trying to do.

Remember, folks, that the legislation itself is the what. It's the big idea. It's the concept. It's the principle. The nitty-gritty of, you know, what time does this happen or who gets to do it or what colour of socks they're supposed to be wearing when it happens or what happens if you don't do it right, that's the how. That's what regulations are supposed to be used for, not, I hasten to add, as this government tends to use them, as a catch-all in which they can do anything they want forevermore and never bring the legislation back here because they've given the minister permission to do whatever they want. That's not what I'm talking about.

So I like what the Member for Red Deer-North has done here. We've got a pretty straightforward preamble. Children are important, we want to make sure that they have an opportunity to learn, good vision is a big piece of that, assessment of a child's vision is an important step, so we would like to do the following. Pretty straightforward here.

A number of definitions, and you have to use definitions in a bill when you need everybody to understand what you're talking about, especially if it's a little different from what the common understanding of that word or phrase is. So you get a definition section in there, which we have.

Then you've got the core of the bill, which is that every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year. A parent or guardian has to provide proof to the school that that has happened. It has to happen within one year. If a kid is enrolling in that school, moving into it, coming from home-schooling into a more structured kind of school facility, fine, they've got to have this done. Okay. That's pretty straightforward.

Here's a bit of the enforcement part. The registration for a kid coming into grade 1 is not complete until that form is put forward, and no optometrist or ophthalmologist shall levy a charge for completion of the form. Pretty straightforward stuff.

Then we get into that the minister may make regulations establishing the criteria, the standards, you know, who's supposed to do what and what colour socks they're all supposed to be wearing on a particular day. That's it, folks. A really straightforward bill.

Then I started to read the letters and the personal testaments that were coming in from people, and I went – well, sorry. I can't swear in here. So you can just imagine what I thought when I saw all of that because, you know, here is where everybody wants to get in: well, it would really be better if it was this kind of person that did it, not that kind of person that did it, and it would really be better if it took place over a period of time rather than immediately before. Everybody wants to get in on making it better. But, folks, we've got to get it past these people sitting in here first. And as much as we love and adore and cherish our health professionals giving us advice, they are not down here voting. Love ya all, but we need these people first to vote for this dang thing.

So we're trying to keep it simple, straightforward. Kids should have eye exams before they come into school. We can agree on that. That's a fairly straightforward principle, don't you think? I

think that's a really good idea, not hard to implement. Good. Let's go ahead with that. That's the point of second reading debate, to debate the principle of it. If we can agree on that simple concept, let's vote for Bill 203, and then we can move forward on some other things. You know what? This bill is not here for the ophthalmologist or the optometrist or the dean of whatever. It is here for the children of the province. That is the bottom line of what we're trying to do here.

I appreciate everybody trying to make it a little bit better, but – I'm going to insult somebody here. [interjections] Yeah, I know. But there's a bit of a ka-ching that I can hear going on – I'm sure I'm not the only one that notices it – and that's the sound of the cash drawer going in and out. So I don't want any of you here to let that stop you from voting in favour of the principle of this bill in second reading, okay? We are just talking about visual eye exams, eye exams for kids, and if we can agree on that, we can work out the rest of the stuff. We really, really can. Don't let that other stuff that's all piling in here blow you off the central tenet of what we're trying to achieve.

4:10

Forgive me for kind of lecturing you on how we're all supposed to be doing this, but I am quite concerned. You know, in listening to my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek, she's raised exactly some of those points. She is talking about the buffet: well, you know, whose bill are we really approving here, Red Deer-North's or some professional association's version of the bill? Take a deep breath. Be one with the universe. We're just voting to have some eye exams for children. Let's just deal with that, and then we can deal with anything else that needs to come on. You can really get in there and pitch strikes and do amendments like crazy when we get to Committee of the Whole. That really is where we start to take the bill apart word by word, phrase by phrase, and where we can make amendments if we think that will make the bill better. Bottom line, folks: this bill is just to get these kids some eye exams.

I'll address some of the concerns that my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek has raised because I know some of the things – oh, the Fribbit package, which is a fabulous package. It really is very well thought out. You know, I can't say enough good things about it. Except that the kids that I represent, those high-risk kids, the chances of them actually managing to get that brochure home are zero to none. In some schools the teachers go around, and they stick the stuff in every kid's backpack when it's hanging on the wall. It's like a mailbox, you know. Well, a lot of my kids don't have backpacks, and the chances that they're going to get that backpack off the little rail and get it home: not happening.

Please just support the principle of this bill in second reading.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Minister of Education.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak on childhood vision in general. I know that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North has been doing a great deal of work on this. Thanks as well to the Member for Edmonton-Centre for perhaps putting this into perspective a little bit.

The concept of testing young children for eye problems or vision problems is an honourable one. While I have some specific issues around this bill, that have already been articulated by the members for Calgary-Fish Creek and Edmonton-Centre as well, the concept of testing for eye problems at a very young age is a most honourable one and something that's been long overdue, and

I certainly fully support it. When we go through the minutiae of this bill, I think it's important to always keep that goal in mind.

I was happy to hear as well that the Member for Red Deer-North has amendments that could help perhaps clarify some of the issues in this bill. I think that the Alberta New Democrats have endeavoured to look for a couple of amendments as well. I think my researchers are working on some as we speak. This bill, Mr. Speaker, addresses a very serious issue that affects children and families in Alberta, but there are a couple of fine tuning points that I think could help to make it better.

This Bill 203 would legislate that all parents would be responsible for having their children's eyes tested before they enter grade 1. The parents must provide to the school a form signed by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. This practice places the onus on the parents rather than the school or health care system in the province. Now, I could stand corrected if I'm wrong on this, but this is the way I've been reading it. So I think an adjustment on that first point is in order, Mr. Speaker.

While the eye doctor is forbidden from charging parents for the completion of this form, which is good, I don't think it necessarily addresses the actual cost related to the eye exam itself. While Alberta health care provides coverage for one visit a year for children up to 19 years of age, it doesn't address the problem if a child needs a follow-up examination or if the child needs glasses. This is my issue here, Mr. Speaker. As it is with any health endeavour, we need to make sure that we are comprehensive when we do reach out to provide an essential medical service. Indeed, good vision at a young age is an essential medical issue to deal with. Of course, there is the identification of that potential eye problem and then the correction of that problem.

What we have now is a classic example of how an essential health care issue is a little bit public and a little bit private – right? – like a little bit country and a little bit rock 'n' roll. For those of you of a certain age, you know what I'm . . . [interjections] There you go.

While you might be able to get an exam for that eye problem, you still have to pay for the glasses and so forth. You know, there's widely variable pricing involved when it's not a comprehensive basic service that we can provide for children who require glasses but who might not be able to afford them, right? It's kind of like dentistry, where you walk across the road and get charged wildly different prices for the same essential dental procedure. We want to try to standardize these basic health services that people need, and I think children's glasses are one of them.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that instead of forcing parents to obtain a test and the form, I think that a public system should be empowered and funded to provide eye exams for all students going into grade 1. By giving that power to the school system, we would accomplish the same goals that this legislation attempts but doing it in a much more inclusive manner. Many parents, for example, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, may not be getting the message or not getting the kids down to the optometrist, so we need to be able to accommodate for that and bring it into the school. Would parents be compensated in any way with this present bill if they needed to take time off from work? I don't know. I mean, there are just lots of issues we need to think about.

The ministry is able to set the conditions and the standards for visual assessment for children who transfer from a school outside of Alberta, where we could make this law into effect.

At the end of the day I'm totally behind the idea of testing vision for young schoolchildren. We know from the stories, when I was speaking to CNIB and so forth, that a lot of people identify

these serious vision issues when they're in grade 2 or grade 3, and that's the time to find correction or even before then. I think that if we do force all children to have their eyes tested, then we can probably make sure that we're doing it at the place where the kids are going to school.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, because there's the Eye See ... Eye Learn program. I was looking at this, and it's an excellent example of a current program that we have in kindergarten to obtain eye exams and, if needed, complimentary eyeglasses, too, all right? However, this program still requires that parents seek out and make an appointment with a participating optometrist in order to have access to the program. So I'm thinking, you know, that we can use some facsimile of this program and enshrine it in some law. I think it's quite good because it provides not only the exam in kindergarten but also a set of eyeglasses if necessary. This program could be an example of a very successful program that would benefit children by expanding it so that eye doctors are actually going to the schools and so forth. Providing free glasses to children levels the playing field for all kids and ensures that they're able to perform in school to their highest ability and also does not punish families who would otherwise not be able to afford those glasses.

I sort of see this as a facsimile of these vaccination programs that we currently have in our school systems, and we can use that as a model, perhaps, right? One day per year the professionals come in and test all the grade 1 students. It could be facilitated by AHS or maybe Alberta Ed or both, and then that way nobody gets left behind, and we cover everything.

In short, this bill is mandating that all children get an eye exam and provide written proof to the administration. I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's a noble cause, but I think that we must make sure that we are making it universal and make sure that when we actually find a problem, we are able to act on it. That way, in fact, we will get the full benefit of this consideration.

So I do support the concept of this bill. I will have a couple of amendments for it. It sounds like the mover of the bill has a couple of amendments, too, and perhaps out of that constructive democratic process we will come to the best possible solution.

Thank you.

4:20

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, especially in the traditional lands of area 6, to speak about Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, for whom I have great respect. She's been extremely passionate, as one of the members said, about continually improving the education system for students but, in particular, the whole advocacy on the vision assessment piece in bringing forward her previous bill, Bill 204, the Irlen Syndrome Testing Act. I know she's worked hard on this, and I want to commend her for her efforts.

Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act, proposes that a child have a comprehensive eye exam prior to enrolment in grade 1. As a parent of three school-age children I recognize the importance of early identification and intervention where a student's learning may be impacted by a health-related condition such as visual impairment. Notably, the Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends that children receive a complete eye exam between six and nine months of age, another between two and five years of age, and annually after beginning school. In Alberta I can tell you that children up to 18 years of age are

eligible to receive regular eye examinations at no additional cost to families or guardians, and the Alberta Association of Optometrists recommends that children and youth in this age range have their vision checked regularly.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education does not mandate any particular form of comprehensive vision assessment prior to grade 1, so this would be quite a change. However, we encourage all families to take advantage of the many programs that are offered for young children. Kindergarten students have the opportunity to take part in the Alberta Health-funded Eye See ... Eye Learn program. This program provides educational materials to support school staff in the identification of possible vision problems, information for parents about the importance of eye examinations, and free eyeglasses to children who require them. Teachers send annual information packages to parents in the early fall of each school year about this voluntary program. Participation requires parental consent, which I think is key. While this is not mandatory, during the '11-12 school year we can say that 44 per cent of five-year-olds completed the eye exam, which is a lot but, of course, not as many as we'd like. This collaborative partnership is one example of how Education and Health are working together to inform parental decisions through education and promotion.

Another collaboration between Education, Health, and the CNIB has provided travelling low-vision clinics across the province for the last five years. A multidisciplinary team that includes a pediatric ophthalmologist, a local community optometrist, an orientation and mobility specialist, two teachers of students who are visually impaired, and a CNIB children's worker travel to communities and provide a comprehensive medical and functional visual assessment. Comprehensive eye exams are also conducted by regulated eye health professionals, who can determine if any particular accommodation is required to maximize student participation in learning.

I'd like to note that Education and Health are also currently working together to develop the report recommended by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. The committee recommended that by November 1, 2014, the ministry collaborate to prepare for public release a report outlining best practices to ensure the greatest quality of visual assessment in Alberta schools.

While I commend the member for her work on this issue, I must say that I'm not in favour of Bill 203. Parental choice in a child's education is one of the founding principles on which the Alberta education system is built. A law that could be perceived to restrict access to start grade 1 because of a parental choice is not what I deem to be in the best interests of the child. We have other valuable examinations and health procedures that we also do not mandate on parents, including vaccinations. I believe that increasing access to eye exams for youth, for children should be an objective of the early childhood development strategy being developed by Human Services. It should be policy. It should be strengthened. Access to it should be increased. But "Should it be law?" is the question. Vision, like hearing, is one of the big enablers for learning. I believe all parents want what is best for their children. But we have to be very careful if we don't want to overstep that parental right of choice and broadly legislate powers to overstep it.

I want to say clearly that I support the intent, I support the idea, but I don't support the bill fundamentally for two reasons. One, if you're going to pass a bill this sweeping on parental rights, I think you need to make sure you do lots of consultation, as you do with any bill. My understanding is that there hasn't been broad consultation with the Alberta School Boards Association, the

Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Public School Boards' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and even the Alberta School Councils' Association or Speak Out, the minister's Youth Secretariat. My understanding is that those groups have not been consulted on this bill and don't have a position on it. Obviously, if this House is going to pass legislation affecting all those groups and all those stakeholders, it's only appropriate that we have some consultation before we do that.

The other piece and the bottom line is that I don't believe legislating something this impactful on parental choice is the right approach when we have a lot of other avenues at our disposal, including strengthening some of our policies and procedures with respect to this.

Bottom line, Mr. Speaker: I commend the member for her hard work. I think this is a great policy item. I think it's a great initiative. I think it's very questionable legislation, and if we were going to pass it, it would need more work.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I have the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-Glenmore and a host of others thereafter, which, obviously, we may not get to, but we'll do our best.

Let's go, Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 203. I, too, want to commend the member for this important initiative to ensure that a process for every child in Alberta be guaranteed to assess one of the most important preventable issues that can face an individual in their whole lifetime; that is, the ability to see, to see clearly, to see at depth, to see at distance, and to see with both eyes together.

My only major concern about the bill is one that the minister has just raised, and that is that we're legislating something that is generally left to professional bodies and that is ensured to be the most efficient and simple and cost-effective approach to identifying what would be a massive number of children in our system and doing it in a way that is both identifying all cases where there is a problem and identifying where they should go after if anything is identified.

I have some questions about talking about a comprehensive eye exam versus a screening assessment, but we can sort those out in the next iteration. I think the principle here is that we ensure that all children have a screening procedure to identify problems with visual acuity, lack of binocular vision, lack of depth perception. Those would be kind of the three keys of any screening program. Public health services for the last 40 years have been doing visual screening at birth. They've been doing it during the well-child visits and at age 3 to 4 for the final vaccination program. They have up until recently been doing some of this visual screening, but they stopped doing it in the last few years. I'm still looking into why that would be. It's an important role, and it's an easy thing for public health nurses to do.

I think the problem is that the government has not funded adequately our public health system, and they are cutting out various things that are discretionary. In that context I think we should make it mandatory that public health nurses be required to do this at the three-year visit and at the preschool visit. They're seeing the children anyway. They are trained to do it. There's no question that it's an important public health early intervention method. At the foundation of it the public health nurses are the ones that have the first contact and the most important screening responsibility and then an important role to refer them to

optometrists, ophthalmologists, pediatricians, family physicians, whatever is appropriate. Teachers, too, should be very much in the position to refer children with any identified visual problem to get an assessment.

My concern about a comprehensive visual examination is that that could include slit lamp examination. It could include gonioscopy, that assesses the pressure in the eye. It could include retinoscopy, which is an examination and photographing of the retina. It could include a range of things that could both take a tremendous amount of time and be an inefficient use of time if everything else in the first screening process has shown no problem. The key, of course, is visual clarity, visual acuity, where glasses might be needed. So at the very first instance binocular vision, eyes working together, and visual clarity would be the two essentials. Some of that is done with public health nurses at age three, but it needs to be mandatory. We need to make sure every child has it at birth and at three and at preschool.

In principle, I very much support this bill. I think it's part of what every good medical system provides. It's not providing it today. That is a problem. Just as we have heard about hearing testing and making it a universal program across the province, this should also be a mandatory screening process, with various professionals mandated to do various levels of screening and the actual examination as needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I will tell you that I have a great deal of admiration for the mover of this bill, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, and her ongoing and very passionate support for literacy issues as well as child visual issues. You know, I think it's one of the strengths of the private members' business aspect of our Legislature that we have the opportunity for members to bring these things forward. I'd like to thank her for that.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard it said before – and I certainly agree – that Alberta is certainly a great place for children to grow and to learn and that our education system – in fact, we continually try to improve it. The Education minister just earlier today gave the results of some of the more recent OECD surveys that showed that we remain very high in rankings of the overall performance of our students. I think the other thing about our education system that makes it really world class is the choices that we offer for parents, and I've talked about this in this House before with regard to the multitude of choices that we have.

You know, one of the great indicators of success, Mr. Speaker, first of our education system and then later in the workforce, is a high level of literacy. In fact, as you know, literacy is one of the measurements that is used commonly to measure countries one against another in terms of their advancement on a social scale. Canada always ranks very high on those, and we can certainly be very proud of that, but Bill 203 speaks to a very real challenge that is facing students in the development of their reading skills, and that is ensuring that their visual perception is not just adequate but that there are no problems with their visual perception.

You know, to give context to Bill 203, I think that we have to look at the impact that literacy has not just on our children but at the impact that literacy has throughout society. The success of our upcoming generation indeed, Mr. Speaker, is in large part dependent on the overall level of literacy that our society achieves,

and we should continue to attempt to have a standard of excellence. What happens or doesn't happen in our school system is certainly both important and foundational. Certainly, the primary purpose of our schools is to promote basic skills, and one of those skills, of course, has to be reading. But a school is a community, and it's a setting in which social and academic activities are highly connected. In the case of developing literacy and developing social skills, certainly good visual perception and accurate visual perception and, in fact, the detection of problems with visual perception at as early an age as possible are a critical part of that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as I've spoken about before in the Legislature, I always find it interesting, and I try to make comparisons back to my background in veterinary medicine. Unfortunately, this is one area where I can't draw a lot of comparisons because, indeed, animals are not as dependent on their eyesight as humans are, especially dogs, cats more so. In any case, one thing I can draw a parallel to is early detection of any sort of difficulties, whether it's an animal or a human, with regard to their development and their ability to learn.

During the course of my practice I had the opportunity to deal with a couple of different situations. One was a case where we were dealing with a dog that was congenitally deaf and some of the challenges that you had with allowing that dog to properly learn. Any sort of sensory defect or any sort of sensory difficulty that a human being has is going to affect very much their ability.

I'm really glad to see that some representation from the CNIB is here. I see that a couple of them have brought their guide dogs, their service dogs. That always makes me smile. The service dogs were some of my favourite patients. They were always so well behaved, they were always so friendly, and they were always so well trained. Besides, they were usually bigger dogs, which is my preference anyway.

Mr. Speaker, it's widely recognized that there is a strong link between illiteracy and criminal activity in our society. While it may be reaching a little bit, I would suggest that any measure that is put in place to improve overall literacy within a society by identifying sensory difficulties is going to have a long-term, positive effect for society. I know that there have been some concerns expressed and there will be concerns expressed about the overall cost of the measures that are being contemplated within the course of this bill. In this particular case, once again, I believe that this is indeed a preventive measure and one that favours early detection of difficulties. That early detection is always something that pays off in the long run.

We will have some debate, and I understand that debate will hopefully continue during committee discussion on this, if it gets through second reading to Committee of the Whole, as to what exactly the right test is and what the right form of screening is for children. But rest assured that I think that anything we can do to encourage parents in the strongest terms possible to have their children tested – I guess I rely in this situation on the most basic thing of all, and that is the concern that parents have for their own children. I mean, that's a basic tenet of parenthood, that you want what's best for your kids. Clearly, if you want what's best for your children, you're going to have your child tested. I think that just naturally follows.

We know that children who do well and have good visual perception and are literate have a better chance at success in school. Sadly, we also know that the opposite is true, that illiteracy is sometimes a precursor to behaviour that leads to criminal activity and can lead in some cases to aggression, delinquency, absenteeism. While it's important that sometimes we see these trends and we ask ourselves, "Are we dealing with

causation, or are we simply dealing with correlation?" I think any measure that advances the critical role of literacy and, overall, assists with the efficacy of learning in our schools is a positive one. I think Bill 203 addresses this.

I think Bill 203 certainly deserves full consideration and the opportunity to improve this piece of legislation at Committee of the Whole. If indeed at some point it is referred to a legislative policy committee, I don't think that would be a negative thing. I don't see why there would be any hesitancy to go ahead with that measure.

Ultimately, this piece of legislation is about our children, and therefore it's about their ability to succeed in school and, therefore, about our future. Mr. Speaker, it's certainly true – and the hon. Member for Red Deer-North is very happy to say this frequently – that you need to read to succeed. In order to be able to read, literacy is critical, and in order to be able to read well, you have to have a good level of visual perception.

One thing I will tell you is that I have a certain degree of personal experience with this because some 12 years ago I suffered bilateral retinal detachments in my eyes and needed to have retinal surgery done. I had a vitrectomy done on my right eye. I have a scleral buckle on my right eye, and that has somewhat changed my visual perception. After that was done, in order to perform delicate pieces of surgery, I required magnification and special lighting so that I could perform some of the surgeries that I did during the course of my practice. It still creates somewhat of a challenge for me when I read, however, especially when I read fine print. The words don't necessarily all line up because of wrinkles in my retina, and that does change my visual perception. So I know some of the frustration that children, especially, can face, especially if those visual difficulties are not well understood by those who are experiencing them.

4:40

You know, as someone who has even a small portion of some of the visual challenges that some of our children and people in general in society have, I think it's important that we put whatever measures in place that we can to identify these at as early an age as possible and certainly at an age where they're entering school so that it can be identified, properly diagnosed, and then a proper treatment prescribed by visual professionals.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, I am very, very pleased to support Bill 203. I think 203 should pass second reading, go through to committee, allow the advocate, the person moving this bill, the Member for Red Deer-North, who is such a passionate advocate on behalf of this issue, to make the amendments, and then allow us to work on behalf of the benefit of all children in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

**Mrs. Towle:** It's going to go to him. We're switching.

**The Speaker:** Chestermere-Rocky View, you're able to go next? Okay. Let's go there.

**Mr. McAllister:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for indulging the change. I wish I would have sent you a note to alert you.

Thank you to every member that has spoken to this point. I am sitting here very much on the fence on this bill for several reasons. Thank you to the hon. member for bringing it forward. Boy, does it ever give us a lot to think about.

I guess I would start by a shout-out to the CNIB, just as the former member did, for being here today and for the advocacy that they do for those that need help. This one is really near and dear to me for a reason that I haven't shared with many people. I don't make a habit of it, but something just happened in the coffee room that I thought would enable me to put a different spin on this and maybe explain where I'm coming from on it.

When I was two, I had a bad vaccine shot and was legally blind for a period of about three weeks. There were three kids in my village that had this vaccine. My vision came back, but I have limited peripheral vision. Anyway, I'm a young guy wearing bifocals, but I'm grateful, so grateful, that I can see. I always celebrate the positives that I have and not the limitations. It's really all I've ever known. I went on to play a pretty decent level of hockey with limited peripheral vision, and although my dad thought I was suicidal for doing it, you do what you do when it's all you know.

To the Member for Calgary-North West: when I just ran into you and spilled your coffee, I didn't see you standing there; I'm sorry. And that may happen from time to time. If you see me trip over something, you'll know that I didn't catch it either.

But about the bill, after having said all of that, the issue of the education angle is where I'm struggling. I can't imagine, as a parent of a young child, showing up at school and not having the form to give to a teacher and having your kindergarten kid or your grade 1 child, I guess it was, turned away because he didn't have the form. To me, that doesn't sound like something we should ever do or an administrator put in a position of having to make that decision. I can't imagine the uncomfortable feeling at a school – and you know this would happen. There are so many parents – and maybe I'm one of those procrastinators – that might not get all their ducks in a row. Fortunately, my wife would take care of most of the important stuff. Mr. Speaker, I know you can probably relate. She would have that all handled, but I may not. If that was the case, I can't imagine a young child being turned away for not having that form. To put a school in that position, where they have to make that decision for several kids, would be something we never want to do in this province.

Fundamentally, I support this concept wholeheartedly. The doctor that just spoke raised several good points as to why it's important to have your vision tested at a young age. I think the concept here is to give kids the start they need and to leave nobody behind and to make sure they're ready to take on the world. We want to do all of those things. I'm not sure that this is the way that I would go about it, but maybe we'll address some of those questions going forward as we, you know, continue to talk about a better way to do it.

Just to conclude my own story there briefly, because I jumped around a bit, I think the condition was optical neuritis. The reason that the vision eventually came back, which I'm grateful for, was that the swelling of the optic nerve reduced. I have three kids of my own, and I can't imagine them seeing the world like I do, and I'd never want them to face the same challenges. If they were able to take an eye test early on and prevent that, I'd be thrilled, like any parent. Of course, we had our kids' eyes tested. I don't know if it's about half that do. Whatever the number is, it's not enough. It ought to be all of them.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But I don't think I'll support this bill in this sense, based on parental choice, based on the questions I have for the education system as to how it might be administered. Again, I just celebrate the fact that the discussion we had and are having is so respectful

on every level. I take points from both sides and just wanted to stand and make a few of my own.

With that, I'll leave it there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

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

**Ms L. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Childhood Vision Assessment Act. I want to thank the many individuals of Calgary-Glenmore who contacted me about this piece of legislation. I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing this forward as it has certainly led to very important discussion in the House so far.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to ensure that there is a process in place so that children undergo a complete eye examination prior to beginning grade 1. More than 25 per cent of school-aged children have vision problems that limit their potential in all aspects of academic success. Unfortunately, when children are beginning to learn how to read, they often cannot identify the problem. Ensuring that assessments are complete prior to reading age would enable educators and doctors to rule out early eyesight problems as possible impediments to learning or reading. Mr. Speaker, I do agree that testing for vision health is important because it can address various problems which adversely affect quality of life.

As a part of its mandate the Ministry of Health is committed to screening for early detection of health conditions. This, in turn, goes hand in hand with the ministry's goal of promoting healthy living. This government is dedicated to building a better Alberta by strengthening our health and education systems in order to support safe and strong communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health has also adopted numerous screening approaches for vision health. In Alberta children up to 18 years of age are eligible to receive regular eye examinations at no additional cost to families, provided by Alberta health care. Early screening that works side by side with our school system could target children who have symptoms but have not yet been diagnosed. This could act as a supplement to screening mechanisms used by our government.

In addition to free eye exams, there are other measures in place that screen children who may have vision problems. We've heard quite a bit about the Alberta Association of Optometrists and their 50,000 brochures that are sent out across the province. These brochures reach out to the parents of young children, informing them of the options for vision health.

The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, which is funded by Alberta Education, is also in place for kindergarten students across the province. This program targets young children at the beginning of their school years, and it provides free eyeglasses to children of kindergarten age who need them. What is great about this program is that it is done with the co-operation of the school system. With this initiative teachers send annual information packages home to parents at the beginning of the school year. The information is an effective way to target and reach as many school-aged children as possible. As it stands, 80 per cent of Alberta schoolchildren enter the learning environment without a comprehensive eye exam. This is concerning as vision problems are highlighted as one of the major limitations to a child's ability to succeed. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, that is already in place, allows children to be screened for many different vision abnormalities. Optometrists can then decide on a suitable medical treatment for the diagnosis.

In addition to the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, there is a framework in development for the screening of infants and

preschool children. This framework has been put forward by the Ministry of Health along with Alberta Health Services, the Ministry of Human Services, and the Ministry of Education. Universal newborn hearing, preschool hearing, vision and developmental screening are all being considered as part of this potential framework. The framework may not only inform parents about the importance of visual assessment but also connect parents and children to the appropriate vision services. Instead of specifically testing for a single health condition, Bill 203 proposes a comprehensive screening program that may help with identification of many conditions that could be impeding a child's learning in the classroom environment.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, our government has in place numerous policies and is working towards developing a framework to address the health and well-being of all Alberta families. As outlined in our five-year health action plan, we made it our goal to ensure that Albertans will live longer and healthier lives. Keeping healthy, prescreening initiatives, and having regular eye exams are all essential to achieving a higher quality of life. According to research done on childhood vision screening in Canada, screening is an important public health strategy for disease prevention.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that enrolment in Alberta's schools is projected to grow by 3 per cent in the year 2014-2015. That means more than 18,000 more students will be entering our world-class education system. This also means that eye examinations will be on the minds of many parents as so many young Albertans begin school for the first time. That is why this government has allocated health funding to include optometric services. As part of Budget 2014 \$805 million was added to assist community and other health services in enhancing the health of all Albertans. This includes vision and optometry services. Bill 203 will go a long way to complement the initiatives supported through this government's 2014 budget. It allows us in the Assembly to discuss the importance of early screening initiatives in working towards healthier lives and ensuring that our children are set up for academic success, to foster the growth of our young people, our communities, and our province.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Red Deer-North has explained, kids need to read in order to succeed. Our confident readers are confident learners, and confident learners become lifelong learners.

To close, I want to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for being an advocate for children's vision health and, my pet project, literacy. Bill 203 would stand to complement many of the existing initiatives in place and will benefit the lives of children across this province. That is why I'm supporting Bill 203 today, Mr. Speaker. I encourage my fellow members to do the same.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** I'm sorry. What?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Did you wish to speak to this bill, hon. member?

**Ms Blakeman:** I would love to speak to this but, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I already have.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Okay. I was reading an old note. My apologies.

Then I will go to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

**Mrs. Towle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying thank you to the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. Her passion for children and childhood vision has been long noted. From my two years here I know that the member has been extremely passionate with all of her hard work, before on Irlen syndrome and on this as well.

I also want to thank the CNIB and the other groups that have come here today to help us understand better exactly what they envision this bill would do for them and for young children in our school system. I appreciate their concerns and I appreciate their input into this bill because I think it's important to make sure that we get it right the first time.

I do have some concerns with the bill. I want to be very clear that I want to support the bill, but I have some concerns. Some of the concerns that I have personally are around the language. I very much believe in parental choice. I very much believe that the majority of our parents will do what's best for their children. And this service is already offered in Alberta. Free exams are offered to every child in Alberta right now, and I think that our teachers right now try very, very hard to ensure that we educate Albertans on what's available.

However, I understand that we as legislators and the government, for the people in the know, are not going far enough to educate Albertans that this service is available and is free to all children under the age of 19, regardless of income. Every single child under the age of 19 can get a free medical exam in Alberta. This does not cause any economic hardship on parents. Parents don't have to worry about going there and having to pay for it.

I do worry that in the language under visual assessments when you discuss the need, the requirement of that form to get into school, to actually enter into the school, you're putting a huge burden onto the school. More importantly, I do have concerns, like the Minister of Education, about restriction of access. Are we really going to tell our children and those parents that if they don't have that form, they can't come to the school? I see the hon. member shaking her head, saying: no, that that's not going to happen. Unfortunately, when legislation says that it must happen, then it must happen. Somebody will interpret it that way.

So I want to support this if we can work on that language so that you can bring it back and that language is softened so that we're able to get to where you want to go and where we need to be. But when you specifically state, "When a student is enrolling in school after grade 1 and has not previously attended a school in Alberta, a parent or guardian must comply with subsection (2) as if the student was entering grade 1," that means that at any age they enter the school system, they must comply with the same visual act. It says that "every child entering grade 1 must undergo a visual assessment prior to the commencement of the school year." This is the bill, but the bill eventually becomes legislation, which eventually becomes law, which means that the school boards will be required by law to ensure that that visual assessment has happened either at grade 1 or at any point that they enter into the school system if they've never been a student in the province of Alberta. That concerns me.

I have additional concerns that as we go forward, I think there needs to be more consultation done on the bill. I appreciate that you've started the consultation process, but I take very seriously the concerns that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has brought forward, where the ophthalmologists and the optometrists and the school boards don't feel like they can support this bill. One has to wonder. If they're not in support of this bill, what are the reasons, what are the barriers, and how can we work with them to make sure that we remove those barriers so that you have the

best bill going forward and so that we can all come to the table together and support it together?

Additionally, I believe I heard the Minister of Education talk about how the standing committee was bringing back a report sometime in November, and I just wonder if we're putting the cart before the horse a little bit. I'd like to see what that report says, if I heard him correctly. If I didn't, I apologize, but I believe that's what he said. I'm just wondering what that report will state.

I think very much that this bill should move to the next stage to allow you, Member for Red Deer-North, to go back to the groups that have concerns with this bill. You did that very well with your Irlen syndrome bill. I think you're very passionate about it, and I can appreciate that. I think you want what's best for our children in Alberta, and I appreciate that, but I think we need to find a way to work with the ophthalmologists and the optometrists to find the connection between the groups that are supporting this and the groups that are not supporting this. Where is the disconnect between what the two need, especially when eye exams are already offered to every single child in Alberta free of cost? Plus eyeglasses.

My concern is that there's something that's a barrier there, and I wonder if it isn't around the "must" factor for the school boards as well when we start saying that they must do something. Then the law will require them to do something, but we don't do that for other things. We don't do it for vaccinations. We don't do it for other issues, yet we're all of a sudden saying: Okay; every single child that comes in has to have an eye exam.

At the same time I believe that as a parent this is my responsibility, totally understanding that not every single parent is able to or willing to or capable of making those choices, but I do think we need to give them every opportunity to do that. I'm just not so sure that we need to go to the mandatory stage. I think that parents do know what's best for their kids. I think that almost every single parent that has their child in school is doing that, and if they're not, the educators who are already there are fantastic. Our teachers, our educational assistants, our parent volunteers are already at the table, and if they identify that a child needs an exam, they're the first person to send the note home. They're the first person to make sure that that child has access. I have no doubt that – I know in my own community our parent volunteers will even, you know, bring the ophthalmologists right into the school to provide that service.

Is there a way, rather than making this mandatory, that we could work with government to actually offer more opportunities to bring the eye testing to the school versus making it mandatory that everyone go to do the eye test at the ophthalmologist's or at the optometrist's? Because it's already there.

**5:00**

I know you talked about how there really isn't going to be an additional cost to the government. Well, there kind of is because right now it's offered, but not everybody takes advantage. I'm a parent of a 12-year-old who does get her eye exam every year, but if my daughter isn't showing any signs of needing the eye exam and she's reading just fine and there's nothing to identify that and I choose to not take the government up on that offer to get her free eye exam, I shouldn't be saying – no school board should be able to say to me that my daughter cannot enter grade 1 because I made a parental choice because there were no identifying factors for her to get an eye exam. Now, that eye exam might be required in grade 3 or grade 6, and certainly we can do that because it's already offered. I'm not critical of that. I'm just saying that . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for the consideration of this item has concluded. You still have two minutes, should you choose to continue when we come back to this item again.

**Mrs. Towle:** Two minutes. Fantastic.

### Motions Other than Government Motions

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

#### Inclusive School Board Policies

503. Mr. Hehr moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation, like Manitoba's and Ontario's, requiring all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to lead and establish gay-straight alliance activities and organizations, using any name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and respectful for all students regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, hon. members, we are faced with the choice between taking action to counter homophobic bullying in our schools or to do nothing, a choice between making things better today or paying lip service to an issue that will not go away without our actions, by following up on trying to end this scourge that is facing our public, private, and charter schools throughout the system. I think that today we can choose to make life better for kids by supporting Motion 503.

That is the basis for why we are gathered here today, and I thank all the people who have come, joined us here in the public gallery to hear the debate and, hopefully, to see it passed and to move the chains of progress forward in this great province.

I think to describe the lay of the land as we currently have here in Alberta, I will take a couple of minutes to describe our school system. Right now in Alberta we have public schools, private schools, Catholic schools, charter schools, and francophone schools. Some of our private schools are largely religion based. So despite the nature of this bill, we have many institutions who have been long established in this province who are somewhat nervous about seeing gay-straight alliances made mandatory in their school system. That's the God's honest truth, Mr. Speaker. Adults are nervous about what this will mean for kids in our school system, what it will mean for what their institutions are allowing, what this will mean going forward.

I don't know why in this Legislature we're so concerned about what those adults, those school boards, those school systems may or may not think in regard to this issue. More importantly than that, Mr. Speaker, we have what's called in this country the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Alberta Human Rights Act. In those two acts – and the minister there confirmed it for me today – it's stated that in any act in this province, and that includes the Alberta Education Act, you are not allowed to discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation. Accordingly, because that is the law of the land, any bill that is instituted in this province – our concerns about what people think on sexual orientation in our school system really have no place, and here's why: because you're not allowed to discriminate against them in any form or fashion. That's a good thing.

So what we should concern ourselves with in this Legislature is whether or not gay-straight alliances are good for kids. That is the

only issue that should be in front of us. As we stated before, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Alberta Human Rights Act make the opinions on sexual orientation of schools in this province who receive provincial government funding, regardless of what stripe they may be, nugatory. It does not matter one iota, so in fact we can look to the best interests of the kids.

The research in regard to gay-straight alliances cannot be more clear, sir. You have research from Egale and research just recently out of the University of Victoria which unequivocally shows that the formation of gay-straight alliances eliminates bullying not only for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer but also for people who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. The research also shows that the bullying rates amongst these LGBTQ students is far greater than those suffered by – quote, unquote – your average Joe or Jane student. That is clear from the evidence that they have presented, and I think that anecdotally we can agree from our experiences in high school that this is in fact true. By not acting on this, we would be denying the research. Okay? The establishment of GSAs in schools not only lessens bullying for LGBTQ students; it also lessens bullying for everyone in the school. Here it is. It provides an inclusive environment, a win-win situation where everyone in the school can thrive and get along. Really, it's an idea whose time has come.

But here's what is holding GSAs back from happening. Simply put, there are some school boards and some administrators who are very nervous about this issue. Let's be clear; it's most likely in our religious private schools and some of our religious public schools, most likely the Catholic school system. This causes them some concern.

What we need to do here, like Ontario has done and like Manitoba has done, is recognize that unless a Legislature acts, unless we say that we make mandatory the establishment of GSAs in schools where kids want them, you will have some groups, whether they be principals, whether they be school boards or the like, who may get in the way of the establishment of the GSA. I brought up a pretty clear example here in question period today. The Heritage Christian Academy, which is a 100 per cent publicly funded school, made their kids actually sign a declaration stating that they will abstain from all things dealing with homosexuality. Clearly, what is the likelihood of a GSA being able to be established in that school? And this is a 100 per cent publicly funded school in this province.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, if we do not act on this, we are burying our heads in the sand and hoping things get better when we know, in fact, that we can make things better today for lesbian, gay, transgendered, bisexual, and queer students and stop the bullying behaviour that is occurring in our schools and make their lives better today and prevent the rise in suicide rates amongst them. If we don't do this, we're ignoring our responsibility to act on base science, reason, and common sense for all of our students in our school system.

I look forward to hearing people's debate on this issue. I encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of it. I believe you'll be on the right side of history on this. I believe that those who do vote against this will be looked at 10 years from now as having stood in the way of progress. My hope is that that will govern the way you look at this issue and the way you wish to assist kids in our system today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize next the Minister of Education, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. J. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for bringing this forward and, before I even start, I think, a big thank you to everyone across the province, the teachers, the administrators, the volunteers that not only establish but work on the gay-straight alliances, which are fantastic groups, and all the other support groups, peer support groups, the clubs that are involved in our schools. They do a tremendous amount of good and often are more impactful than the formal education. I know that they were in my past life as well.

I want to say that it's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 503, which urges the government to introduce legislation that would require all school boards to develop policies to support students wanting to establish gay-straight alliances, activities, and organizations. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the truth is that we already have.

As Minister of Education I can tell you that the success of every Alberta student is our highest priority. Our government recognizes that student achievement and personal development become virtually impossible if students feel threatened, unwelcome, or are undergoing undue mental and emotional stress. This is why our government has worked so hard to ensure that every school in Alberta is inclusive of all students and welcoming of all diversity in all shapes, forms, sizes, and colours. This was the impetus behind the government's Education Act. This legislation will come into effect in 2015. It includes the expectation that every Alberta school will strive to establish a learning environment that is "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe [and inclusive]."

We're tremendously proud of this legislation as it contains some of Canada's most effective, most proactive, and toughest antibullying provisions anywhere in Canada. I'd like to take a brief moment to point out for the House some specific provisions within the act that will help foster acceptance and further increase the inclusiveness of our schools. Under board responsibilities already in the Education Act section 33, for instance, states:

- (1) A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to . . .
- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

And tied to that, this seems to be exactly what the member is asking for:

- (2) A board shall establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board's obligation [under the above] to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.

The intent of these provisions is powerful and highly effective in ensuring that all students, we hope, irrespective of their differences, are provided with a healthy and inclusive learning environment. I would argue that these elements do exactly what the motion requests, albeit more broadly – agreed – to ensure that no support groups, no areas, or no clubs are exempt.

I've said in this House before, Mr. Speaker, and we've said many times that we absolutely support gay-straight alliances. They do fantastic work in Alberta schools, and we would love to have more of them just like we'd like to have more of many of the support groups that do good work across the province. They can all be a very important way to promote healthy, respectful relationships and to prevent bullying.

However, I do believe that the member's approach to this issue in the motion in question is not the most appropriate way to go about combating bullying. Singling out a specific group of

students in legislation, potentially at the expense of other students being forgotten, is troublesome. There are, like I said, many other highly effective groups like GSAs that promote acceptance, build bridges, and help fight bullying, but we can't possibly legislate for each and every one of these groups, Mr. Speaker, so instead we endeavour to create schools and learning environments that are accepting of all students and empowering for all students regardless of what their differences are.

With the student at the centre of every decision we make in education, it's crucial that school authorities and local school administrators have some autonomy, some flexibility, and a responsibility to make these decisions, so instead we set clear expectations of boards and schools to have appropriate policies in place, which is what we've done in the Education Act and seems to be what this member is asking for. We seek to empower the school boards and the schools to determine which clubs, supports, and resources are most appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of their students, their staff, and their school community in line with the resources that they have and the demand that they have. To support students interested in forming GSAs in their schools, Education recently developed two fact sheets, Gay-Straight Alliances in Schools and Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance in Your School: A Tip Sheet for Students. Those are online and among the resources available to schools and teachers and students.

Additionally, a ministry representative sits on the Alberta Teachers' Association's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Subcommittee, and the ministry staff also provided input into the creation of the PRISM tool kit, which assists teachers with age-appropriate strategies for promoting respect for sexual and gender minorities.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, we must make certain that we consult with stakeholders extensively. I know that the hon. member across the way agrees with me and likewise believes deeply in the need for consultation and takes regular delight in admonishing me for not taking enough time to consult when we do policies, when we do budget, when we do legislation. However, I think it's important to note that on this critical issue for some reason he opted not to engage with education stakeholders. This lack of consultation prevented these important decision-makers from being at the table and being able to be part of the role in development of this motion and the policy implications or legislative implications that would come with it. In fact, until they learned of it in the media, they were unaware that the motion existed at all.

Organizations representing education leadership like the Alberta School Boards Association; the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association; the Public School Boards' Association; the Alberta School Councils' Association, which is parents; my Speak Out group, which is the minister's youth advisory group; and the College of Alberta School Superintendents, just to name a few, weren't even notified of the member's motion. I have to question why a member holding such strong conviction on the need for broad consultation and engagement and embracing everyone would fail to do so entirely, on his own motion no less. We cannot legislate without consulting broadly with those who work on the front lines.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, decisions about starting a gay-straight alliance in any particular school are best made by the local school authority. They're empowered to do that. They're expected to do that. The standards for that have been heightened in the new Education Act, and they seem to align with exactly what the member is asking for and align with what some of the other provinces have done, which he has quoted. I wholeheartedly support his support for GSAs. I wholeheartedly support his intent

in bringing this motion forward. I don't support the motion for the reasons that I've stated.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll next recognize the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, followed by Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

**Mr. McAllister:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I start by acknowledging everybody that came today to listen in on this debate up in the gallery. Thank you. Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this motion forward to the floor of this Assembly. It deals with an issue of critical importance, I believe, in our schools.

I also think there isn't a person in this Assembly today who believes that any form of bullying in our schools is in any way acceptable. Regardless of partisan stripe I am absolutely one hundred per cent confident in saying that each and every one of us believes that no student should be subjected to bullying for any reason whatsoever, be that race, religion, gender, social status, or sexual orientation. It is not acceptable. I've only been here two years, but it's probably one of the only issues that we unanimously agree on. I would suggest bullying is completely unacceptable and has no place in the classrooms or in this province, period.

Motion 503 calls for all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to establish gay-straight alliances. In effect, it means no school can overrule a student who wants to start one up. Now, while the motion's purpose is noble and while I personally believe the student-led efforts to oppose bullying of all kinds should be encouraged across the province, it represents an overreach of the Legislature. I believe the local school boards are best suited to deal with the bullying issue, and many of them are and should be applauded for the great work that they are doing on the GSAs that have started in this province.

**5:20**

Earlier on I said that I was one hundred per cent confident that each member of this Assembly opposes bullying on any grounds. For the same reasons I am just as confident that those we elect to sit on our school boards feel the exact same way. The same people who elect us, Mr. Speaker, elect them. They elect us to do a job on their behalf, to come to this Assembly and pass legislation. We try and ensure timely access to health care, education, and other important provincial services. They also elect school boards to do the job on their behalf, and a major part of that job is to provide a safe, caring, and inclusive learning environment for each and every student who walks through the halls of their schools.

In fact, the presidents of both the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association have made that point loud and clear and, I would like to say, very respectfully also. They have disagreed with the motion in how it was presented. They were not consulted on the motion at all, and they probably could have and should have had that opportunity from the local level to have brought their thoughts forward and their insight for they are in the most appropriate spot, I think, to see what's happening on the ground. It's their job to ensure that students are treated with respect by their peers and to deal with those accordingly when they are not. From my experience, it's a job that Alberta school boards and their elected trustees take extremely seriously and that they do quite well. It's one we should allow them to do without legislative micromanagement crafted by provincial politicians underneath this dome.

We must also recognize that not all schools are the same. We have public schools in densely populated and diverse urban areas.

We have public schools in remote rural areas. Some public schools, particularly in Edmonton, are faith based, having joined a public system that has been inclusive of them. We, of course, have many Catholic school boards, who take great pride and care in providing the opportunity for the faith of their students to be strengthened while receiving a world-class education. We have dozens of excellent independent schools, that provide a faith-based educational experience for Christians, for Muslims, for Sikhs, and for many, many more.

It would be highly inappropriate for us assembled in this Legislature to use our power to force schools, particularly faith-based schools, to sanction any organization that might teach or promote concepts that contradict their sincerely held religious beliefs. Doing so may be well meaning, but in effect it works to protect the rights of one group by disrespecting the closely held beliefs of another group. We must support school boards and teachers in their faith-based schools to find the best ways to combat bullying of LGBT students or any other students in a way that is also respectful of their beliefs and faiths. I believe that fundamentally, Mr. Speaker.

Now, because the problem we are trying to address here is bullying, bullying of all kinds, whether that be the bullying of LGBT students, visible minority students, students that struggle with obesity, students with special needs, religious students, all students – we're talking about every single student, Mr. Speaker – I'm absolutely certain that our schools, whether they are public, whether they are Catholic, independent or faith based, are committed to that goal. So rather than mandate and prescribe how to best accomplish this, let us instead set the clear expectation that every Alberta school must work to provide a bully-free educational experience, provide our schools and boards with supports and resources where needed, and then place our trust in our schools, in our teachers and school boards, as they continue their work to combat bullying of all kinds.

In closing, I just want to say how thankful I am to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for raising this issue. He has done an incredible job, I believe, raising awareness and bringing it to the public's attention. I have no doubt his efforts will reap rewards for many students. I know his passion with this issue will remain strong long after the debate on the motion that he has brought forward is over in here. While we might disagree on how to achieve it, I assure him and I assure all Albertans that the Wildrose strives for an education system that is welcoming, respectful, caring, and safe for all students. I look forward to continuing this discussion and working with the hon. member despite his nonstop heckling throughout my entire speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize next the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest in speaking to Motion 503, perhaps an opportunity to help clarify how this fits into a larger picture of equality and social justice in our school systems across this province as we speak. In fact, as I reflected on the motion from Calgary-Buffalo, I realized that I myself was part of the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee with the Alberta Teachers' Association, that started to formulate a detailed plan on how we can attack discrimination in all of its forms in our school systems through education, through training, and through exposure to diversity. The Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee came up with a comprehensive

way, back in 2002, 2003, by which we can teach teachers and also students, forming clubs and so forth, about sexual equality and social justice as well.

I see the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's motion as a logical extension of this, not to exclude other forms of discrimination as we might encounter them but to be an important part of a four-point plan to attack inequality and social injustice directly in our schools right across the province. Of course, the motion that he has here,

requiring all school boards to develop policies to support students who want to lead and establish gay-straight alliance activities and organizations, using any name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and respectful for all students regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity,

fits in very well with the larger plan. Replace those words with another motion that might talk about cultural identity or religious identity or other cultural or perhaps visible minorities, and then you have part of a larger package that really does attack inequality and social injustice as it exists here in the province of Alberta. It's always attention. We cannot presume that we'll ever win this battle somehow with inequality or sexual inequality in our schools, but it's a good way to always remind ourselves along the way that we make education combined with legislation that attacks these inequalities head-on.

In 2006 the Alberta Teachers' Association published *Gay-Straight Student Alliances in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers*. While this document is by no means governing legislation, it does discuss the responsibility of teachers to provide inclusive environments for students. This also provides some background to support knowledge for teachers on how to develop GSAs in their school. The guiding points: a series of consistent pieces of legislation that could assist students and teachers in developing gay-straight alliances if they wanted to establish one. There's a long-standing policy there that we can build on. Certainly, we just want to enshrine that policy as it can exist in all schools in the province.

While students and staff may want to start a gay-straight alliance in their school, an unexpected push-back may in fact come from school administrations working out of fear that parents will be complaining or protesting. Alternatively, some parents may feel that it is against their rights to have the child exposed to a gay-straight alliance on religious grounds. This combination of push-back or expected push-back is a problem that we need to overcome. That's why this motion is so important.

Mr. Speaker, from the fact that Bill 44 education aspects were passed as one of the bigger barriers for schools who actually want to start GSAs or undertake any activity to promote inclusion in their schools, if parents are given the legislative authority to put their kids out of discussions that deal with sexuality or gender expression, then schools are hesitant to pursue this. That's exactly the problem with Bill 44. So until we remove that part of Bill 44 that allows that sort of activity to take place, then that's the actual legislative barrier that this motion seeks to counteract. Again, I really admire the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this forward.

5:30

Bill 44 creates an environment where schools are confused as to what they can or cannot talk about. The need to opt out or to notify: those clauses also create unneeded layers of uncertainty. If a gay-straight alliance wants to hold any activity or meeting, it would have to inform all parents. This bill needs to be repealed, Mr. Speaker. Even as we pass legislation to mandate the creation

of gay-straight alliances, the fact that Bill 44 is on the books makes an actual implementation of this motion very difficult.

Edmonton public school boards have already had similar types of policy in place for teachers, students, and schools to develop GSAs in their schools. As well, Edmonton public schools, I think, provides an excellent example to provide some model that we can use across the province.

Gay-straight alliances have demonstrated a history of success as advocates for the LGBTQ youth as well as proponents of school safety. We know that where there is the existence of GSAs, the problems with discrimination and violence are reduced. It's important that institutional support must be provided as well to students and educators who wish to establish and lead these groups. Support from above eases resistance from students, teachers, and the community and provides validation for those engaged in this important work.

Contemporary research demonstrates that discrimination of all kinds is rare within schools, as I said, that actively promote the appreciation of differences and a sense of community. The empowerment of oppressed groups means empowering everyone in the end, Mr. Speaker. We've seen examples of this in Ontario as well that have worked quite well. I can also speak from personal experience teaching in schools, Edmonton public schools such as Victoria school, where there was not just a GSA but an active attempt to educate all students and parents and teachers and support staff in regard to equality and social justice issues in regard to sexuality, which paid dividends far beyond anything that we could imagine.

This motion is very modest. Like I say, I gave you a bit of a historical context from whence it came, and in the interests of a larger pursuit of equality and social justice I believe that not only is the member's motion's heart in the right place, but the words and the action that surround it are, too. So, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this motion. In the spirit of optimism and a sense of equality it's something we can be proud of moving to the future.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I'll next recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, followed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just trying to remind myself that it's 2014. I actually had a kind of really nice, happy, kind of weepy response that I was going to do in supporting Motion 503, and then some people spoke. So I'm not going to be quite so nice as I thought I was going to be. I really am struggling particularly with the Minister of Education's remarks that somehow the new inclusive Education Act is just as good as accepting a motion that actually would take action to allow gay-straight alliances. This particularly burns me when that act took out the mention of the Alberta Human Rights Act, which was in there before. So does the minister have credibility with me when he says that that act is going to be just as good and that's the act that took out the mention of the Alberta Human Rights Act? No. It doesn't carry a lot of weight with me.

You know, the second thing that should have happened there, when we were talking about inclusive education, was to make sure that this Assembly went and opened up the Human Rights Act and removed the odious section 11.1, in which parental rights were allowed to trump any discussion in a classroom of sexual orientation. So, on the one hand, that new human rights act actually recognizes sexual orientation under our protected grounds

and at exactly the same time comes out with a monster big club and says: but you're not allowed to talk about that or refer to it in a classroom or people can remove their children or blah, blah, blah. A huge amount of misunderstanding and, frankly, homophobia flowed from that.

It's 2014. We actually are in a new century here, and I will not accept the Minister of Education standing up and saying that that act is going to be as good as what's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you know, that a code of conduct is somehow as good as a student-driven effort in which they devise actual action to move forward on this issue as compared to a bunch of talk, a bunch of words. We're trying to empower students that are going to come together and make their peers and themselves better equipped to deal with the world. But no. We're going to take a step back here and say: well, we're worried about parental rights. You have your parental rights. You've got everything you need from parental rights. You can remove your kids from the classroom right now, and that's what that bill gave to us. So you've got lots of parental rights if you're not comfortable with this.

What this motion is trying to do is actually give those kids some tools to move ahead. We want to make sure that all kids, all schools get to move ahead, that we don't end up with – what was it? – oh, yes, inequality. Somebody said that somehow we would have equality across the schools if we don't put this in. What you'll get if you don't put this in is inequality. You'll have some schools that will allow GSAs or support them and others that won't, and they don't want to be seen making that decision. They want somebody else to say to them: you do this; that's it.

Let me take a little sidebar here, a little, wee tangent. I don't know what it is that's just happened in this Assembly. Somehow with the two private member driven proposals that have come forward today, all of a sudden people have an expectation that we have massive departments and a lot of staff that are going to go out and consult with all these people, that we've got budgets to mail stuff out and launch websites and go and consult all these people, or that somehow the work of Bill 203 isn't worth it because she didn't consult everyone in the world twice or that this member – I mean, we share exactly four researchers. How do you expect us to go out and consult with all these different groups? That's just not a possibility on this side of the House. I'm sorry that you've never had that experience, and I cannot tell you how much I'm looking forward to you having that experience. Okay.

That's what was meant to happen here, that this would be an opportunity to actually support kids that want to get together. This is the mushy part. Now, I was very lucky to grow up as a drama kid. Drama kids tend to pull into their group a lot of other kids that feel like they're misfits or a little strange or weird, and often that strangeness or weirdness was a kid that was trying to work out their gender identity or their sexual orientation. So we felt very protective, and we were very strong groups that incorporated everybody. We didn't separate anybody out. We protected everybody and moved forward. So the idea of a gay-straight alliance is really home to me. It feels right because I had the advantage of that, not named that but essentially the same thing.

The other thing that really strikes me about this is the ISMSS and the development of Camp fYrefly, which is the camp for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans kids, in which they get to go to camp and be gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, two-spirited kids. At the fundraising events that we had been to to raise money for this camp – to see grown men weeping because they didn't get that opportunity. There was no place for them to go where it was safe, where they could talk about those questions that they had or how they felt.

5:40

It's quite magical as grown-ups to be able to support something that younger people are trying to do to make their world a better place, and I think it's important that we support Motion 503 for exactly that reason. It is an opportunity for kids to be with their peers and to be normal, to be okay, to be included. That is normal. You know, folks, it is normal. We do have all kinds of kids. They come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, including different sexual orientations, different gender identities.

**Mr. Hehr:** And they go to religious schools.

**Ms Blakeman:** And some of them go to religious schools. Some of them go to private schools. Some of them are home-schooled. Some kids are in the public school system. If you're in the Edmonton public school system, you even get it better because their board actually passed a gay-positive, a queer-positive motion in the way they were going to deliver education. This is to make sure that all kids are going to get that benefit, not picking and choosing which schools are going to deliver it but making sure that that opportunity is there.

I really like the wording of the motion that says that if the kids identify that they want to have this gay-straight alliance, then the schools will help them do that. They don't have to run it. They don't have to be the boss. They just have to facilitate that this organization will come together for those kids. That's exactly the way it should be.

Ah, yes, here we have it. This is the Camp fYrefly special emblem, and some of you, I know, have been. Some of my colleagues on the other side have supported Camp fYrefly's efforts. Thank you very much for that. I know Kris Wells was here earlier. We've got a number of people in the gallery. Some pink shirts from the University of Alberta. Thank you. My fabulous constituent, Rob Wells. I know that Ben from the Pride Centre is here and a number of other people. Thank you very much for coming out for this. It's important that you see how democracy works and how it's a bit of a slugfest sometimes.

I do encourage people to support this. It's for the kids. You know, for all the parental rights and all of the inequalities in the ways schools are operated and what their mandates are, at no point should we ever be saying that you can discriminate against someone because of your religion. That is the antithesis of what we should be doing here. In particular, when we know that there are kids out there that need this special kind of support from their peers, we should not be denying it. We should be the leaders, here in the Legislative Assembly, that are making this possible and are making it possible across the board so that there are no exceptions in the schools and the school boards that are delivering this particular program for them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

I'll recognize the hon. Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

**Ms Jansen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to Motion 503, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This motion, as we all know, urges the government to support students who wish to establish gay-straight alliances in their schools. I am honoured to have LGBTQ issues in my mandate, the first time in this province's history, and I take that very seriously.

Specifically, Motion 503 calls for the introduction of legislation that would require school boards to implement policies that would

provide those supports. Now, I understand that in general school boards need to have the autonomy to assess the needs of their school communities, and the prevailing opinion is that gay-straight alliances in a particular school are best decided by the local school authority and the school. But this is what I'm struggling with. There is an inherent disconnect between embracing the value and success of student-led GSAs and then saying: by the way, if a school board is uncomfortable with it, then it's not student-led at all. This is my problem with the arguments I'm hearing.

The key to the importance of this motion is that it supports students who want to establish gay-straight alliances in their schools. Now, why would students want to do that? They want to do that because (a) they have gay students in their schools, and I bet you every school in this province does, and (b) students want to encourage support and acceptance of LGBTQ issues. With respect, a board superintendent, even a teacher cannot assess the level of acceptance and even safety a student feels more than the students themselves. Students have to have the freedom to decide if a gay-straight alliance is needed in their school, and if they do, we need to ensure they have the right to establish them. It is the right thing to do.

So, yes, I wholeheartedly support Motion 503 and the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Gay-straight alliances are extremely important. They are an important component of any inclusive school environment that endeavours to reinforce positivity and inclusiveness in the process of learning. They promote understanding, and they cut down on bullying behaviour. Everyone agrees on that.

I am proud of our government's School Act, that calls for schools to be safe and inclusive spaces. I think that's wonderful. I believe that empathy and humane respect for one another are prerequisites for any meaningful education. This is why we have to continue to strengthen our commitment to fostering respect and diversity in all the schools in Alberta. It is impossible to learn in an environment in which one feels unsafe or belittled. This goes for every single student as well as for teachers, administrators, and even parents, for that matter.

Under section 45 of the School Act all school boards are expected to conduct themselves in compliance with this most basic, fundamental necessity for positive student learning. This takes into account the fundamental fact that a one-size-fits-all policy is neither a practical nor a realistic approach for conducting business or delivering education. Just as we rightly expect school boards to respect diversity in our students, we also have to respect our students' ability to decide if they need a gay-straight alliance. It cannot be student led if the board has the ability to veto it. This is not about taking power away from school boards; it's about giving power to students to make safer school environments.

Alberta is an incredibly diverse province, Mr. Speaker. That means that the diversity is not only in our landscapes; it's in each school board from Calgary to Edmonton to Lethbridge to Cold Lake. They all face their own unique circumstances. We know that all schools in the province may not want a gay-straight alliance, but that need isn't a board's to determine; it's a student's to determine. This is not a question of religious rights, and it's not a question of sexuality as much as it is a question of the right to free speech and free assembly.

Students are driving this issue forward. My concern about a school's or a school board's ability to opt out of allowing a gay-straight alliance is that in some conservative school cultures that gay-straight alliance might be vitally important, perhaps crucial, to an LGBTQ student's feeling of safety and inclusivity. It's important to remember that, first and foremost, all GSAs are grounded in issues of equal access and accommodation which are

firmly established and protected in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and all provincial and territorial rights statutes.

Importantly, the core function and mandate of school-based GSAs are related to meeting the significant health and safety needs of LGBTQ and allied students. GSAs in faith-based and other communities play a critical and important role in helping to build vibrant, welcoming, and faith-affirming classrooms in schools for LGBTQ students, teachers, and same-sex parented families.

I want to close with the words of Patrick Burke, the president of the You Can Play team to end homophobia in sports: 64 per cent of LGBTQ students say they feel unsafe in their own schools. Sixty-four per cent. A gay student is five times more likely to drop out of school. A gay student is three times more likely to attempt suicide than a heterosexual teenager. We have teenagers, children, who feel so worthless that they would rather tie a rope around a tree than face another day in school. Gay-straight alliances help LGBTQ students feel safer in schools. They reduce bullying. They promote acceptance. Making sure every LGBTQ student in this province has the opportunity to be part of one is the right thing to do in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, we probably won't get to all of these speakers, but for the record I have the members for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Calgary-West, and Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Thank you.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak in defence of the Alberta LGBTQ community and the youth community and to support Motion 503, put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Growing up is tough. It can be tough growing up at the best of times, but it's also tougher when you're made to feel different. Many of us are from different walks of life, different cultures, different parts of the world. Many of us have experienced this. We heard these stories earlier in the Legislature on another motion.

Mr. Speaker, you know, bullying actually leads to assault. All evidence points that those kids who do the bullying end up later on in life with a higher chance of becoming criminals; those who get bullied have a higher chance of depression, anxiety, alienation, and, the ultimate, suicide. I've seen many effects as an inner-city trauma doctor on young people, who overdose and come to us. Many young people slit their wrists because they're made to feel that they don't belong.

When this happens to children, especially children in a school system – imagine going to school every day wondering if you're going to get beat up, how you're going to be treated, and no one is going to stand up for you. Sometimes in certain areas, heck, the teachers are part of the problem. If the administrators of a school system don't have the courage to allow children to feel safe, how are these children going to feel? These are democratically elected administrators of school systems.

Mr. Speaker, we all need to send a message as policy-makers – the buck stops with us in the Legislature – on the tone of respect and dignity and how we as a society should treat one another. That's what we're talking about here today, about how we speak daily about one another. Now, as you know, this country is founded on principles of freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom to express who you are as an individual and to speak freely about it and not promote hate.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of stuff has been said, and I thank the hon. members in the PC caucus for showing support and making compassionate, very rational arguments to support this motion. On behalf of the Alberta Liberals, as the leader, I'm proud to stand here and support the LGBTQ community, support our children. It's about our kids, about making them feel safe and welcome and, really, about building a better, more inclusive Alberta, a more inclusive Canada. I believe it's time that we had the courage to say: hey, this is not the Alberta of yesterday; this is the Alberta of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, I'll say one thing. This province is growing. We've got people from all over the world and all over the country, from all walks of life, from all religions, from all sexual orientations. They're all Albertans like anybody else. It is the duty of the majority to protect the minority, and that's exactly what is an absolute, fundamental principle of democracy. There is a pollster who actually spoke, you know, and showed the polling of the country and the province. These are comments from a pollster from Ipsos-Reid. He said that there will be little room in Alberta for those who are homophobic or bigoted, that this is not who Albertans are; this is not who Canadians are.

I would encourage every member of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you have 30 seconds if you'd like to participate.

**Mr. Dorward:** Mr. Speaker, bullying in schools is not restricted to the LGBTQ community. In fact, I was bullied when I was in school, throughout school. Many would not know that I actually grew eight inches after high school. I was the shrimpiest, tiniest little kid in school. Also, in the work that I've done in the community and religious work, there are many people that get bullied because of their religious beliefs. So to single out a situation is not necessarily appropriate.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate. I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate on Motion 503.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think many viewpoints were put forward here today, yet I stand by the statement that today in this Legislature we can choose to do nothing, or we can choose to do something that will make kids' lives better today. I could submit that this motion, which will allow the formation of gay-straight alliances in schools where kids want them established, is what will help move our society forward, will help our LGBTQ community not only to live with more pride, more dignity, but it will also reduce bullying that occurs in our schools for those students as well as for all students who attend that school.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, the reason why we need to act today is exactly the reason that Kris Wells wrote about in the *Calgary Herald*. I'm going to quote from Dr. Wells's article right now.

This religious resistance is exactly the reason governments in both Manitoba and Ontario have legislated that all schools must support any student who wants to start a GSA and name it as such. Alberta [should] follow suit. The status quo is no longer acceptable. If we fail to act, we will do nothing more than allow discrimination to flourish and we will continue to build an apartheid system of education in our province where LGBTQ

students are treated as second-class citizens in their own schools. This is not the kind of Alberta that I want to build.

I stand with Dr. Wells on this. I do not want to build that kind of Alberta either.

Simply put, without us legislating this here in this province – maybe we are only urging the government to do this in this motion – if we do not legislate this in this province because of religious reasons and many of those reasons which I think are no longer valid, school systems, school boards, and some administrators will not be willing to allow kids to establish a gay-straight alliance. It's particularly for that reason that we need to ask.

You saw the statistics brought up by the Associate Minister of Family and Community Safety, who, in my view, gave the best speech on this issue here today. It was clear, it was cogent, and it hit all the right notes in terms of protecting children in our society. If you heard the statistics she brought up about the rate of children being bullied in our schools, how some of them do not even want to go to school because the bullying is so bad that it's leading them to commit suicide, that should be reason enough for every member who is here today to vote in favour of us moving forward on this issue. To not do it is simply to deny what is happening in our schools, to deny that there is a problem, to deny that things won't get better on their own, because they won't. They won't. We would simply be delaying this for another 15, 20 years.

I urge everyone in this Assembly to do the right thing, to do what I believe is not only good for our kids but good for our society.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to everyone for listening. Do the right thing.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 6 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Bilous	Fawcett	Lukaszuk
Blakeman	Hehr	Notley
Brown	Hughes	Scott
Calahasen	Jansen	Sherman
Dallas	Klimchuk	Swann
DeLong	Luan	Woo-Paw
Engen		

**6:10**

Against the motion:

Amery	Fraser	Oberle
Anderson	Fritz	Pastoor
Barnes	Goudreau	Rodney
Bikman	Johnson, J.	Rowe
Campbell	Johnson, L.	Saskiw
Casey	Kubinec	Starke
Cusanelli	Leskiw	Strankman
Donovan	McAllister	Towle
Dorward	McDonald	VanderBurg
Drysdale	McQueen	Weadick
Fenske		

Totals: For – 19 Against – 31

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, it is past 6 o'clock, and the Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

The Legislative Policy Committee on Resource Stewardship will convene this evening in committee room A for the consideration of the main estimates of Transportation at 7 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:13 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]





## Table of Contents

Prayers .....	333
In Memoriam	
Mr. Jonathan Joseph Lord, December 29, 1956, to March 26, 2014 .....	333
Statement by the Speaker	
Welcome to the Premier .....	333
Introduction of Visitors .....	333
Introduction of Guests .....	334, 339, 352
Ministerial Statements	
Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event .....	336
Oral Question Period	
Severance Payments to Premier’s Office Staff .....	339
Federal Building Redevelopment Plan .....	339, 343, 345
Progressive Conservative Party Trust Account .....	340, 341
Flood Recovery Communications Contracts .....	341
Government Policies .....	342
Education Property Tax .....	342
Education Initiatives .....	343
Domestic Violence Offender Monitoring .....	344
LGBTQ Student Supports .....	344
Pembina Institute Funding .....	345
Avalanche Safety .....	346
Travel Alberta Executive Expenses .....	346
Builders’ Liens .....	347
Members’ Statements	
Emergency Housing for Women .....	347
Federal Building Redevelopment Plan .....	348
Red Deer College Athletic Achievements .....	348
Volunteers .....	349
Earthquake in Chile .....	349
LGBTQ Student Supports .....	349
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	349
Statement by the Speaker	
Speaking Time .....	351
Orders of the Day .....	352
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 203 Childhood Vision Assessment Act .....	352
Motions Other than Government Motions	
Inclusive School Board Policies .....	361
Division .....	368

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