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The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

Issue 14

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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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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Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
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Amery	Khan
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Chair: Mr. Rogers

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Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
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Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 8, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, hon. members and all.

Let us pray, and let us be thankful for the great bounty that we enjoy in this wonderful province called Alberta, where our families can feel safe and secure, can live free from persecution and imposed strife, and can share in a global culture that is truly respectful of others. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member's 12th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go to Introduction of Guests, let me take a moment and remind you that today we have a member among us who is celebrating his 12th anniversary as an elected member of this Legislative Assembly. So please join me in thanking him for his service to this Assembly and to Albertans as I extend congratulations to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with the Minister of Energy, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you an outstanding group of students and their teachers and parent helpers from the elementary school in the community of Calmar in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. These 34 bright grade 6 students along with their teachers Ms Jeanette Wilson, Scott Olsen, Kathleen Sikliski and parent helpers Rebecca Eilander and Troy Mutch are here with us. Please, let's give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 66 of the very best and brightest grade 6 students that I've had the pleasure of meeting, from the wonderful school of St. Augustine. They are here with their teachers Sharon Hackett, Romeo Cruzat Mandanas, Ken Hackett, Laura Engler and parent helpers Melissa Ocampo, Brandon Bishop, Courtney Louis, Michelle Auclair, Nancy Giles, Gilda Soosay-Horvath, and Erin Fleck. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups or youth to be introduced?

If not, let us move on to the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly representatives from the Turkic-Canadian community. Today the Turkic-Canadian community came to the Legislature to

share their cultural heritage. Participating countries such as Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Uzbekistan put on a wonderful display of arts, crafts, and great food, including the famous Noah's pudding, all very typical of the grand Turkic tradition.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to introduce the following representatives that are seated today in your gallery. My apologies if I struggle with some of the pronunciation of these names: Cuneyt Zumrutpinar, the Anatolian Heritage Federation; Ibrahim Cin, the Intercultural Dialogue Institute, Edmonton; Orhan Benli, the Anatolian Heritage Federation; Nazgul Aitkulova from the Kyrgyzstan community; Malik Muradov from Turkmenistan; and Kenan Tuzlak from Bosnia-Herzegovina. There are also many other community representatives seated today in both galleries. I would now ask all our guests in the galleries to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon three guests of the Assembly who are seated in the members' gallery and are visiting us from Writing-on-Stone provincial park. I'd ask them to rise as I read their names: Aaron Domes, who is the head of visitors' services; Suzanne Lodermeier, who is the visitors' centre co-ordinator; and Juanita Tallman, who is an interpretive supervisor. This exceptional team was the driving force behind the First Nations interpretive internship program at Writing-on-Stone provincial park. This program provides visitors to the park with an authentic Blackfoot cultural experience and recently won the gold medal at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada public-sector leadership awards. They have risen, and I'd ask my colleagues to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The leader of the loyal opposition, followed by Medicine Hat.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Mr. Troy Mutch, national president of the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association. Troy has been honoured with several awards, including the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee medal for his leadership and commitment in the Canadian fire services, and he is also one of Alberta's flood heroes. Troy helped bring Tide's loads of hope to High River, which enabled the residents to have clean clothes along with some sense of normalcy. But today he's here as a father, accompanying his son's class to learn about the Legislature. Troy, please stand and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students that are no strangers to many of us. We had a fantastic meeting for an hour and a half this morning with the Council of Alberta University Students, many of whom were introduced yesterday by the Premier. They are also looking forward to the estimates debate this afternoon on Innovation and Advanced Education. As I call their names, I would ask that they rise in recognition of their relentless advocacy and continued perseverance to make Alberta's postsecondary education system affordable and accessible and to ensure the highest quality of

education for all Albertans. From the University of Alberta we have Adam Woods, Petros Kusmu, and Navneet Khinda. From the University of Calgary we have Raphael Jacob and Jarett Henry. From the University of Lethbridge we have Shuna Talbot, Sean Glydon, and Chris Hollingsworth. From Mount Royal University we have Sadiq Valliani, Missy Chareka, Erik Queenan, and Seija Roggeveen. The always cheerful executive director of CAUS, Beverly Eastham, joins us as well today. I would now ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Associate Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, I understand you have two introductions. Is that correct?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed. We'll then hear from Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a born-and-raised Edmontonian who is in this House for the very first time: Mr. Hubert Lau, executive vice-president of Viewtrak Technologies, an Edmonton-based company that's a global leader in livestock information technology solutions, that currently produces the number one pork-grading tool in China and will soon be the number one lamb-grading tool in the world. He is now standing, so I would like to ask my colleagues to give him the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two guests who are helping to enhance and expand Alberta's business and trade ties with the world. I have Ms Sarah Tiet, VP of marketing and operations, and also Mr. Ven Côté, partner and senior adviser with AMCC. Now, Ms Tiet is originally from Asia, and Mr. Côté, originally from Quebec, actually was the recipient of the Ernst & Young entrepreneur of the year award for the prairie region as well as named among *Alberta Venture's* 50 most influential people in 2009. Alberta is most fortunate to have these energetic and dynamic businesspeople helping us to open new markets. I would like to ask my colleagues to give them the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine for the last 20 years, a great supporter of mine, Yusuf Kharadi. He's a journeyman electrician, honest and hard working. He came today to share in the Turkish celebration. He's seated in the members' gallery. I will ask Yusuf to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Speaking Times

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday was a very historic day in this Assembly. Not only was it the first day for Alberta's new Premier, Alberta's 15th Premier, but it was also very noteworthy to hear his very important message delivered at a time called Ministerial Statements, as was it important to hear from other members when everyone spoke about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Your chair knows of the deeply held emotions that are triggered by the subject of residential schools

because I grew up very near to the Alexis reserve, and I saw some of what was talked about yesterday occurring.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission allows and empowers people to tell their stories. In keeping with that theme, yesterday there were some very emotional statements made in this Assembly. As Speaker I was proud to preside over an Assembly, over a Chamber, where, for example, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake was able to stand and tell her personal story involving residential schools. The speeches that were given by other members and by the Leader of the Official Opposition also spoke to many outside these walls who know that their stories have resonance with all of us.

As I mentioned yesterday, at page 351 of *Alberta Hansard* for April 7, 2014, there were some complaints by some members forwarded to me regarding the time that was given by me to members who asked to participate in responding to the ministerial statement. I indicated that I would provide some guidelines with respect to the speaking times for ministerial statements today, including responses to ministerial statements.

In reviewing the background and rulings on this subject over the years, I found the most succinct statement to actually be in a document that I sent to House leaders on January 23, 2014, entitled Proposed Changes to Assembly Procedures: Comments Prepared by Table Officers. To quote from that document, I said the following:

There is nothing in the Standing Orders that provides for the length of time that a Minister may take in delivering a Ministerial Statement. Likewise, there is nothing about the length of responses by the Official Opposition or any other opposition Member. The practice of allowing a Member of the Official Opposition a response of 3 minutes has been followed since the June 13, 1986 ruling by former Speaker David Carter. As there is nothing in that ruling or in the Standing Orders, a further practice has evolved of seeking unanimous consent of the Assembly to have a Member of any other opposition party respond for 3 minutes. In the interests of certainty, House Leaders may wish to consider amending the Standing Orders to either codify the existing practice or modify it.

Some members may recall a ruling I gave on May 14, 2013, at page 2391 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, that dealt with the topic of ministerial statements, especially the length of them.

I also want to point out that one of the most important jobs of the Speaker, although not much is written about it, is to sense the mood of the Assembly and to apply the rules in light of those circumstances. That is what I did yesterday with respect to the speaking times that I allowed in responding to the ministerial statement.

In fact, the Premier spoke for exactly five minutes according to what I've been provided by way of timing. The Leader of the Official Opposition spoke for three minutes and 47 seconds, 47 seconds over the traditional allotted time but well worth it. Same with the Premier: bang on. The leader of the Liberal opposition spoke for three minutes and five seconds. The leader of the NDs spoke for one minute and 54 seconds. The Member for Calgary-Foothills spoke for a minute and 38 seconds. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake spoke for five minutes and 41 seconds. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo spoke for two minutes and 40 seconds. So I granted the appropriate amount of leeway, judging the mood of the House at the time. [some applause] Thank you.

Moving on to another subject, that being the subsequent order of business. Specifically, for those who are participating in Members' Statements, we have a different rule, which is why I enforced the speaking times found in Standing Order 7(4).

Unfortunately, I had to cut off two people at least because they ran over the time, more than two minutes. Members will know that these statements are part of the daily Routine and are not unique. Members know the rules on speaking times and also should know the anxiety caused when one member is seen to be allowed more time than another, which is in direct violation of the rules. I have no choice but to enforce those rules and to try and be as fair and as impartial in my rulings as possible when doing so.

I'm sorry to have taken up a couple of minutes of time from the Assembly on this point, but it was of great concern to me, as it was to some members who wrote to me, sought clarification, and, as I mentioned earlier, even complained. If there are any further questions on this or any other matter, I encourage you to please contact me privately if you wish. Many of you have been in, and we've spoken about numerous items over the past nearly two years. I would welcome you to come in again, and we can pursue the conversation even further.

Thank you for your kind attention and your adherence.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Rural Homelessness

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness anywhere is devastating, but today, colleagues, I want to specifically raise the issue of rural homelessness and encourage our government to ensure that the plight of the people outside of Edmonton and Calgary is also on the agenda. Little is known about rural homelessness, and unfortunately few resources are directed towards addressing this issue. Homelessness in rural Alberta directly contributes to the growing problem in larger centres. The youth emergency shelter society in Edmonton estimates that 40 per cent of their clients come from rural Alberta.

Homelessness in Alberta's rural and remote communities is far less visible than that in the larger cities. People cannot live on the street in a small rural community, and as the situation worsens due to a lack of services, these people often end up in larger centres. This creates a whole new set of problems that increase the likelihood of this individual becoming chronically homeless. This individual is removed from their family and their familiar surroundings and any possible support from their friends and family. They're generally not recognized as homeless until they've been in the city for at least six months and therefore cannot access the necessary supports and services. They become vulnerable to exploitation and the lure of criminal activity as they have no home, money, friends, or resources in the city.

In booming rural communities even the gainfully employed might be homeless as there are often limited housing options and those that are available may be prohibitively expensive. Assisting people to achieve stability in their own rural communities greatly increases their chances for personal success. Without a concerted effort to develop an evidence-based slate of solutions at the policy and program levels, our ability to respond to rural homelessness will be limited.

Let's not forget our often invisible rural homeless.

Government and Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, the town of Sundre needs to dredge in strategic locations to prevent flood damage, but it's not happening. The community of Rocky Mountain House needs a new hospital

and the need grows more acute every passing day, but it's not happening. This winter demand for natural gas has increased 10 per cent and over the five-year average has increased 13 per cent, yet the prices charged to consumers have increased 100 per cent. It makes no sense. Big industry continues to manipulate electricity prices, and when we ask questions, the minister gives completely unrelated answers.

1:50

We now have a new Premier and a new PC leadership race. What does this mean for Albertans? PC leadership contenders are ministers that can't or won't answer straight questions. They claim that an approval to build a sky palace didn't happen even though it did. Another claims that the worst environmental coal mine disaster in Canadian history is safe because mercury and lead might somehow magically dilute in water. They believe that borrowing is not debt and spending over and above revenue is not a deficit.

As the PC leadership candidates set out to repaint the *Titanic*, there's good news for Albertans. There is a government in waiting, a Wildrose government. [interjections] A Wildrose government will prioritize an infrastructure list so that communities can view their projects on a provincial priority basis. A Wildrose government will stop the price gouging in the utility markets and protect consumers. A Wildrose government will develop natural resources in a responsible manner while taking a zero-tolerance approach to irresponsible polluters. A Wildrose government will be responsible with our finances. We will care for our most vulnerable by investing in seniors' care, front-line workers, and front-line services. We will not tolerate discrimination on any level.

You see, Mr. Speaker, a Wildrose government will be responsible, honest, and caring. Thank you very much. [interjections] Albertans have an alternative. [interjections]

The Speaker: I hope that's not the signal of other things to come.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Before we start question period, please be reminded that you have 35 seconds maximum for the question and 35 seconds maximum for the answer and there are no preambles anticipated after question 5.

Let us start with the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Wildrose uncovered yet more instances of taxpayer waste at Alberta Health Services. We found out that between April 2012 and September 2013 AHS handed out \$250 million in outside consulting fees for things like fine arts consultation, public image surveys, executive coaching, and even government relations. It seems that AHS can't even get a meeting with the Health minister without hiring outside help. To the minister: wasn't Alberta Health Services created with the express purpose of eliminating this kind of bureaucratic waste?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member took the trouble, she would also have told you that the lion's share of that \$250 million was spent on one-time costs that were directed at consolidating the former nine health regions. These areas include 13 systems related to IT. They include a human resources pay project that was directed at consolidating former payroll systems, reclassifying employee positions, and putting in place the

foundation to run a 100,000 person organization, a \$13 billion budget, and the largest health organization in this country.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. With all the high-priced executives, you'd assume that they had some of this talent internally and wouldn't have to contract it all out.

Last week we learned that Alberta lung cancer patients typically wait twice as long for surgery as opposed to lung cancer patients elsewhere in Canada. With this kind of waste in AHS, is it any wonder? Instead of dollars reaching the front lines to reduce wait times for patients, they're doled out to high-priced consultants to the tune of a quarter billion dollars in 18 months. To the minister: wouldn't \$250 million be better spent treating patients rather than hiring consultants?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the type of uninformed generalization that the hon. member brings forward again and again. As I said, the lion's share of those dollars was related to one-time costs involving very specialized expertise, that brought together nine former health regions and consolidated them in one, achieving great administrative savings in the process. The other thing the hon. member ignores is that today the consulting services budget of Alberta Health Services, as of last December 31, is \$48 million. Those one-time costs have been paid. These dollars are going down as a percentage of total expenditure, exactly the way . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the Health minister didn't hear that this was between 2012 and 2013. The consolidation happened six years ago.

Alberta Health Services has become the enduring symbol of this government's broken promises and wasteful spending. It was formed six years ago, as I mentioned, promising to streamline administration and focus spending on the front lines. The exact opposite has occurred. The bureaucracy has ballooned and so have the wait times. To the Health minister: will he immediately order a review of AHS consulting practices so that more dollars flow through to actually treat patients?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is available to her or any member of this House at any time to ask those sorts of detailed questions. The fact of the matter is that today Alberta Health Services, by any definition, has the lowest administrative costs of any health delivery organization in the country. There is an Audit and Finance Committee that oversees audit activities within AHS. The Auditor General of Alberta or a member of his office regularly attends those meetings. There is tremendous oversight, and as I said, those one-time costs have been dealt with. Today's cost for the same services stands at \$48 million.

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

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues will have more questions for the Health minister later.

Government Communications Budget

Ms Smith: Last week we learned that the government directly employs 214 communications specialists who each earn more than \$107,000 a year on average, for a total annual cost to taxpayers of \$23 million. Almost every week we give examples of damaging

spending cuts that impact real Albertans, cuts that could have been avoided if even some of this money for spin doctors was redirected to front-line services. To the Premier: is he sure that this \$23 million spent on communications specialists is money well spent?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that we're always looking for ways to be more effective in terms of communication and more effective in terms of how we manage the public's resources. But I can also say to the hon. member that it is absolutely inappropriate to describe 214 communications people who help Albertans understand every day how they can get government services, how they can connect with government and get the information that they need – it's really interesting that the opposition has tweeted out that they have five communications officers to support 16 people, and we have 214 who support 27,000 people, who work for Albertans every day.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had a feeling that the Premier would defend this. After all, he oversaw Human Services with 25 communications staff, to say nothing of the 17 comms staff in Environment and the six comms staff in Tourism. By the way, those comms staff in Tourism make \$122,000 a year on average. If these employees are such great value, then why does the government routinely spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in outside communications consultants across every department every year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, on an annual basis we have, as I said, about 27,000 people, who work for Albertans, directly employed by government and many, many more who work in government services, boards, agencies, and commissions across the province. We have a budget of about \$42 billion that we're in the process of discussing. Two hundred and fourteen people may be the right number; it may not be the right number. We're going through a results-based budgeting process, and we're looking at everything we're doing to make sure that we're doing the right thing for Albertans, we're doing it in the right way, and we're making the most efficient use and effective use of public resources.

The public wants to know what government is doing. They need to know the information, they need to know how to connect, and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: Well, the Premier may not know whether it's the right number or the wrong number, but I can tell you that Albertans know that it is the wrong number.

Alberta Health employs an incredible 16 communications staff who are making \$121,000 a year. Now, these 16 employees are over and above these scores of communications specialists who work for Alberta Health Services. Mr. Speaker, given that almost all communications are generated by Alberta Health Services, not the Health ministry, can the Health minister please explain what exactly these 16 people do?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know about the hon. member, but I happen to think that the people that oversee the expenditure of 45 per cent of the provincial budget have a pretty important role when it comes to explaining to Albertans how to access those programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is engaged in the usual tactic of trying to besmirch the reputation and devalue the work of public servants that work very hard both in AHS and my department and, in fact, all of government every day in order to make sure

Albertans have the information they need to access health care. We stand by that, and Albertans stand by that.

2:00

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

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If you missed it, the Health minister said that he actually doesn't know the answer to that question.

Ministers' Meetings with Industry

Ms Smith: The PC leadership race is under way, and the former Minister of Municipal Affairs has done the right thing and resigned from cabinet to pursue it. It is time to hear from his other ambitious colleagues. The Minister of Infrastructure must know that when he is meeting with construction companies who want to build hospitals and schools, it's unclear if he's doing that as the Minister of Infrastructure or as a PC leadership candidate fishing for donations to his campaign. Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership, or will he resign from cabinet and stop using taxpayer dollars to campaign?

The Speaker: Well, let's hear from the Minister of Infrastructure. Again, a similar reminder to what I gave yesterday about dancing on the edge of issues that are an internal party position. [interjections] But let's hear from the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the hon. member is right about one thing. I have been meeting with members of industry, and in fact they've been pretty productive. On one hand, the opposition complains that they want the 50 new and 70 rehabilitated schools done on time – I'm working very hard with my colleagues here on this side of the House to make that happen – and then they turn around and complain about that happening. [interjections] We're building Alberta. We're having conversations with industry that are actually building those schools. We'll continue to do that. It's the right thing for Albertans. Everywhere I go, people say that they're very happy that we're working with industry. They want those schools. This government does. We're going to deliver.

The Speaker: Are you done? Calgary-Shaw, are you done?
Let us go on to the first supplemental, hon. leader.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Infrastructure isn't the only cabinet member who is in a potential conflict of interest. The Minister of Energy also hasn't ruled out running for the PC leadership. She must know that when she's meeting with executives from major energy companies, it's unclear if she's doing that as the Minister of Energy, ensuring responsible development of our resources, or as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations. [interjections] To the minister: will she confirm today that she's not seeking the PC leadership, or will she resign her position from cabinet and stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: We have a point of order at 2:02, and now we have another one at 2:03, so we're just going to move on, hon. leader.

Let's go to Edmonton-Meadowlark for your first main set of questions. [interjections]

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

The Speaker: Please have a seat, hon. Member for Airdrie, okay?

Mr. Anderson: I would like a point of clarification, and I would like it right now. [interjections]

The Speaker: I will give it to you later. Let us move on. [interjections]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. [interjections]

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have a right to a point of clarification under our standing orders. I would like it first.

The Speaker: You do, and you will get your point of clarification a little later. Let's move on. Time is ticking, and you're wasting it as you speak. So please be seated, okay? [interjections] Please be seated.

Let us go on to Edmonton-Meadowlark, please.

Flood Recovery Communications Contracts

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kudos to the Wildrose opposition for exposing a quarter billion dollars of wasteful contracts in AHS. We don't need PC spin doctors. The Liberals say that we need family doctors and nurses and real staff.

The gifting of contracts to Navigator, which the Premier said is due to their unique talents, is another prime example of how this PC government wastes taxpayer dollars. After the flood they had ample resources and talent to communicate with Albertans: a Minister of Municipal Affairs, three associate ministers, and 214 highly paid PAB staffers. To the Premier: what unique talents did this PC-insider firm possess that your PC government lacked?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, last June one of the most tragic environmental events in Alberta's history occurred. It was a massive flood that affected many, many thousands of Albertans and changed their lives. This government responded by bringing all hands on deck to ensure that we dealt with the issues that were raised, the concerns that people had, and the responses that they needed. That involved all the people we could muster within the government and those that we needed to hire to bring on in order to handle specific areas of interest and expertise. We do not apologize for responding to the needs of Albertans at a time of crisis in their lives.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the flood happened in June. Navigator's untendered quarter million dollar flood contract wasn't signed until October 28, and it expired on October 31. The only crisis that existed was the Premier's leadership review. The Premier says that this was good business for Albertans. I call it a PC porkfest. One of the very few and very basic tasks set out for Navigator was to submit weekly reports, that we asked the Premier to table two weeks ago, which he failed to do. To the Premier: do you even have these reports, and if so, will you table them today, or is this another Mar-Charlebois affair?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the very question demonstrates why this hon. member is not competent to run a government or anything else. The fact of the matter is – and he would know it if he had ever been in business. He would know that sometimes you have to get on with the job, and that's what this government did in June and July and August and September of last year to help Albertans overcome the most tragic time in their lives. [interjections] The paperwork came, but for him to suggest that the contract didn't start until the paperwork was done is to suggest that he doesn't know how business is done in this province by many, many people. [interjections] I once wrote a contract for a gas plant, and the plant was built . . .

The Speaker: Third and final question, hopefully without interruption.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, this Premier was Health minister, a cabinet minister, and now Premier, and health care is still a mess. Yesterday the Premier said that I know nothing about business, that “sometimes you have to get on with the job and do the paperwork later.” But unlike the Premier I am a businessman, not a political lifer, and I can tell you that the PC government is doing business bass-ackwards. It’s no wonder that this government is broke, in debt, and cutting public services. In business you don’t start work without a contract. You don’t give the contract to the first guy that comes along. To the Premier: will you ask the Auditor General to investigate all untendered government contracts to ensure that Albertans are getting the best value for their money?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans deserve to know that that hon. member would stand around until all the paperwork was done before he lifted a finger to help people in need. This government will not do that. This government did not do that. This government rose to the occasion and helped Albertans in need.

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

Mr. Mason: Wasn’t that last set a joy, Mr. Speaker?

LGBTQ Student Supports

Mr. Mason: Last night the House voted down a motion that urged the government to introduce legislation requiring school boards to support gay-straight alliances as a means to combat bullying in school. While unanimous Wildrose opposition was predictable, twice as many PC MLAs opposed the motion as supported it: 22 to 11. Mr. Speaker, bullying should be stopped in all schools, not just some. Will the Premier agree to introduce legislation similar to Manitoba’s and Ontario’s in this session and make it a government bill?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the motion last night was a very important discussion to happen in this House, and I applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing it forward. It epitomized one of the issues that we have all the time in this House, and that is competing values. While I think it’s extremely important that our children and youth be supported in having a safe, caring, and respectful environment in their schools, we also believe it’s very important that we have school boards who are tasked with the job under the School Act of making sure that that happens. Two competing values. Sometimes you have to resolve those values and find a way for that to happen.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First sup.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is not a value to allow some school boards to permit bullying to take place. What if you’re a kid in a school where the school board decides to suppress gay-straight alliances and you get bullied as a result? How is that a value that this minister, this Premier, can defend?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it’s absolutely abundantly clear under the School Act and under the new Education Act that each school has to provide a safe, caring, and respectful environment for every child, and it’s the school board’s obligation to make sure that that happens. It is absolutely against the law for people to allow bullying or to promote bullying in our schools.

Mr. Mason: I seem to have united the right, Mr. Speaker.

The unanimous no vote by the Wildrose caucus shows that the lake of fire is still their resort of choice, but had the PC caucus voted differently, this important motion would have passed. Again to the Premier: will he introduce a government bill to support gay-straight alliances in any school where the students want one? Put your bills where your mouth is, Mr. Premier.

2:10

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let’s be very, very clear. We support gay-straight alliances. They do fantastic work. [interjections] The question put to us last night was not: do you support GSAs? It was: do you want to legislate one in every school? [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, would you like to complete your answer please?

Mr. J. Johnson: I don’t think I have anything further to add.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let’s move on, then. No more preambles now. Let’s go to Calgary-Fish Creek.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

(continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite an annual management budget of over \$400 million, AHS spends \$460,000 every single day on additional consulting contracts. That’s 38 daily hip surgeries that could have been funded but weren’t, that’s 14 daily bypass surgeries, and that’s 42 daily knee replacements. Instead, the government chose to spend almost \$30,000 on an AHS image and reputation strategy report. Well, Minister, I’m going to give you some free advice. If you want to improve the image and reputation of Alberta Health Services, fund surgery, not consultants. When are you going to start?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear about the information that was obtained by the opposition, in an 18-month period Alberta Health Services spent \$250 million on consulting services, the lion’s share of which were related to the establishment of AHS and the consolidation of systems in the nine former health regions. Today Alberta Health Services, as of December 31, is spending about \$48 million on contracted services. Now, I would be the first to question the same contract that the hon. member just mentioned. As she knows, that contract was let by the former board, and the contract was subsequently cancelled.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I honestly do not know what to say. From ’12 to ’13, Minister, not six years ago. Given that AHS policy on consultant engagement lays out very specific terms and rules on how contracts are to be awarded, who they can be awarded to, and the tendering process that must be followed, can the minister assure this House that all \$250 million worth of consulting contracts follow these rules and were above board in the eyes of Albertans? And I caution you, Minister, in how you answer this one.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the caution that is needed is to the hon. member and her colleagues about how they ask these questions because what they presented earlier today as a news release to now raise in this House as a question of adherence to established policies and procedures with respect to the awarding of contracts is a gross misuse of the information that was obtained

under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This hon. member knows that there are appropriate places to go within the Legislative Assembly, and it's committees to ask these sorts of detailed questions. I challenge her to present those questions to the Public Accounts Committee, to have them answered in public . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: They don't answer the questions there either, Minister.

Given that last week we learned that outside of AHS this government already employs over 214 communications staff at an annual cost of \$23 million, will the Minister of Health perhaps consider lending one of the 16 comms staff his ministry employs the next time AHS needs help spinning the government's bad news of the day?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what that question was intended to elicit, so I'll take the opportunity, as the hon. Premier did in answer to an earlier question, to remind the hon. member that those communications officers within the Public Affairs Bureau, that also work within our departments and within agencies like AHS, are there for the purpose of providing information to Albertans about how to access the programs and services that matter to them. If this hon. member doesn't think that those services provided during the flood in her constituency or in other times when Albertans were in need are worth while, then I challenge her to tell that to the members of the public service.

Road Ban Exemption for Grain Transportation

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, it is essential that Alberta farmers have efficient grain transport available to ensure that their products get to the buyers. The government announced an exemption on seasonal road bans for farmers hauling grain to elevators. To the Minister of Transportation. The road bans are in place for a reason. What kind of damage can be expected, and what is the plan for quick repairs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We all know that Alberta farmers have faced a series of challenges getting last year's crop to market, and we want to be able to help them to clear the backlog. It's still too early to know exactly what the impact of easing road ban restrictions for grain trucks will be, but my department is closely monitoring all routes and will use the results from the special permits and will repair any damages that occur. In addition, if a particular route is too susceptible to damage, we'll require alternative routes.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: what will the province's responsibility be towards the cost of this contemplated road damage, and are municipal roads involved?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, like I said, my department is monitoring these routes closely for damage, and we'll act quickly to make any necessary repairs. The cost of these repairs will come out of Alberta Transportation's highway and road maintenance budget, and it's important to note that we don't expect these costs to be significant.

The Speaker: Final supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. This will be to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Has it been established that by lifting this ban, it guarantees that all the grain to be moved actually will be moved?

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, there are very few guarantees in life, and I don't think I'd want to go so far as to guarantee that. But it is a really good piece of news, and I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for his role in this because it's very important that all parts of the system work together. We've been encouraging that kind of collaboration, and I think it was important that our government do our part. We've been lobbying hard the federal government for them to do their part, and they are reacting. We'll see how this all goes in terms of guarantees, but it's certainly going to help.

Government Spending

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we have government ministers flying around on government planes, using government money from the taxpayers to go to government announcements, using government-sponsored communications materials, going around and talking to stakeholders across the province on the taxpayer dime, and there are some people that are worried that doing so if they're also concurrently running a leadership race is a conflict of interest. I would like an answer to this question. Will the Minister of Infrastructure, who may be planning on running for leadership now resign and run his leadership . . .

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you have a point of order. I assume it's on a similar vein to the questions that were asked earlier.

I believe the Minister of Infrastructure already clarified this matter once. I will allow one further clarification from the same minister, and that, I hope, will end it, okay? This is heading more and more into an internal party matter, which is what the leadership is all about. It's not about government business.

So answer the government part of that if you would, please, and proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will assure Albertans that Albertans' work is going to get done. It's getting done now and will continue to get done. We've got 50 new schools to build, 70 to remodel. We're doing planning on a Calgary cancer hospital. We're looking at doing lots of other work. We're looking after 1,600 government buildings. That's the work that Albertans sent us here to do. I and all my colleagues are doing that work every day. The member may be distracted by other things, but I want Albertans to know that this government is actually focused on what's important to Albertans every day, and we're doing that work.

Mr. Anderson: I would note that the former Premier, who just stepped down, did the right thing and resigned. Maybe you shouldn't have stabbed her in the back.

Mr. Speaker, today we've learned that Alberta Health Services has handed out \$250 million to high-brass consultants over the last 18 months. Included in that quarter of a billion dollars is \$3.1 million for things like, quote, communications support, social media campaigns, image and reputation strategies, unquote. To the Minister of Health: why couldn't these things have been done by the dozens of people already employed by AHS?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I'm at a bit of a loss as to how this question follows on the previous question, but here we go. As I said earlier, the vast majority of the dollars spent were one-time expenses that were incurred to purchase very specific expertise that would allow the consolidation of IT systems, payroll systems, and other human resource systems within AHS. Those expenses are certainly reasonable given the scale of the consolidation that occurred, the fact that AHS is the fifth-largest employer in the country, and the fact that it is an organization that spends \$13 billion of the \$42 billion budget of this province.

2:20

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, given that data also show that more than \$600,000 was handed out for executive coaching, which is defined as, quote, stimulation of the client's self-discovery by posing powerful questions that take the form of thought experiments, unquote, Minister, can you explain why taxpayers are paying 600 grand to help high-priced health executives find themselves?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have a similar question about that contract. As the hon. member knows, a number of these contracts were overseen by a previous board at AHS. I don't know the answer to his specific question. What I do know, Mr. Speaker, is that we've taken the steps so that those sorts of contracts will not be seen again in the future. If he has detailed questions about specific contracts, I encourage him to raise them at the appropriate time in Public Accounts.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Caribou Conservation

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all to the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Within Whitecourt-St. Anne forest companies have raised issues regarding caribou population in my area. They are currently listed as threatened under the Canada Wildlife Act. Can the minister explain what action he's taking to protect caribou herds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the question. This is a very important issue to that member; it's a very important issue in my riding of West Yellowhead. We believe that caribou conservation and human activities can occur on the same lands. We're working with stakeholders to create action and range plans to help sustain the caribou populations. So we have 15 range plans that will be developed by the end of 2015, which will protect our herds and also adhere to the federal legislation, so Little Smoky by early 2014, Cold Lake by 2014, northeast caribou range by 2014, and the northwest caribou range by the end of 2015.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the issue does not only impact Alberta, what's the federal government doing to support our provincial efforts right here at home?

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to talk to the federal minister about caribou and about some of the plans that our department is looking at to make sure that our herds are

preserved. I can say to you that the federal government is entering into a captive breeding plan for both Jasper and Banff national parks. We're looking at that option, but I do think that we can partner with the federal government to make sure that we have a good program in place. I am concerned that we make sure that the SARA legislation is looked at and that we're resolving problems at home.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The aboriginal community, especially the community in my constituency, can help with this matter. Are they going to be involved in any way in any actions moving forward to help resolve this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again a very important question. I've had very good dialogue with the First Nations and Métis communities across the north, and I feel that there is a real place for First Nations people to be involved in the stewardship of these herds. In my own riding in Grande Cache we have what's called the caribou cowboy program in place, using young people and mentoring them with elders. The program has now been running for two years; it's been federally funded. We've seen great results as far as keeping animals off roadways and reducing poaching and also doing research through the Foothills Research Institute so that we can continue to do this valuable work.

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

Legal Aid Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It is nonsensical to claim, as the minister does, that there is no relationship between the government of Alberta and the Legal Aid Society. The society is enacted by the government and receives the majority of its funding from this government. So to the Minister of Justice: when will the minister stop blaming his federal Conservative cousins for the state of Alberta's Legal Aid Society and get on with it? It's his file. Man up.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Justice department increased funding to Legal Aid last year and will do so again next year. Eighty-two per cent of all funding to Legal Aid comes from our government. This member needs to join with us in asking the federal government, which I personally do support, to give us more money for legal aid. Less than 18 per cent comes from the federal government. It's time for them to improve access to justice like we are doing as a government.

Ms Blakeman: It's not their file.

Back to the same minister: at what point does the minister consider things are serious enough that he will be moved to some action other than blaming the feds? Is it the incarceration of the poor, the mentally ill, and those people on the margins of society?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, last year we gave an injection of \$7 million more to Legal Aid. Alberta Justice is committed to access to justice for all Albertans.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. So far all we've seen is this minister's agreement with the voluntary employee separation program for legal aid and a request from him to cut services. Meanwhile, he gets all-expense-paid trips to FPT meetings to complain about federal funding. When is the minister going to actually take responsibility for this, which is his file, and do something?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, the last FPT meeting that we had was in Whitehorse in November. It was not a vacation, and it wasn't a sunny destination. All 10 provinces, the entire governments in Canada, passed a resolution asking the federal government to step up to the plate because legal aid is a joint responsibility between the provinces and the federal government. I sincerely appreciate this member's concern.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Attorney General's answers on this question simply are not good enough. Section 7 of the Charter protects life, liberty, and security of the person. The courts have made it clear that leaving someone without legal representation when they are at risk of incarceration and when the case is complex violates both sections 7 and 11 of the Charter. Now that Legal Aid has decided that not even those who receive AISH due to mental incapacity qualify for help, Alberta's rules on their face violate the Charter. To the Attorney General: why are you allowing your government's disinterest in equal access to justice to violate the life, the liberty . . .

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe it's incumbent upon any of us to give a legal opinion in this Assembly, but I'll remind this member again that 82 per cent of the funding of legal aid comes from the province. That is \$58.8 million. Alberta Justice believes in access to justice for all Albertans, and we are living up to our responsibilities.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, given that yesterday we read about a man who is autistic and receives AISH because it's been determined that he did not have the ability to hold down a job, any job, and given that any reasonable person would then conclude that such a person cannot represent themselves in the courts, why won't this Justice minister act to protect the life, the liberty, and the security of this and other disabled Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice has acted and will continue to act in the interests of all Albertans and access to justice. In 2005 our contribution to legal aid: \$20.2 million. This year: \$58.8 million, over 100 per cent increase. The numbers don't lie, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the number of people not getting help is growing.

To the Attorney General: given that he knows full well that provinces are constitutionally responsible for the administration of justice and that the negligence of his federal friends is simply not an excuse for his own government's intentional neglect, will the minister at least apologize to Albertans for his complete failure to protect the most fundamental and basic legal rights of an ever-growing number of vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I believe that could be a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). [interjections]

Our intent is to support all Albertans, to support access to justice for all Albertans, and that is what we are doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, did I hear you enunciate a point of order as well?

Mr. Denis: That was just in my response, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I could hardly hear it, so I'm just looking for clarification.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are we ready to move on?

Let us go on, then. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Pembina Institute Funding

Mr. Hale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy sector is the economic engine of Alberta and Canada, and we need major pipeline projects to get our oil to market, which is why I was surprised to learn that this government is currently funding political groups that are working to stop the Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and the Energy East pipelines from getting approved. To the Minister of Energy: should taxpayers be funding antipipeline groups like the Pembina Institute that want to put our energy future at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question, and part of the answer is that the funds that have been going to the Pembina Institute are to do research with regard to carbon capture and storage, also alternative renewable frameworks. Quite frankly, the energy companies also fund the Pembina Institute.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, given that, on one hand, this government was dealt a major blow last year when the courts ruled against its decision to ban the Pembina Institute from a public hearing and given that, on the other hand, the Pembina received over half a million dollars from various government departments, can the minister explain to taxpayers what is going on?

2:30

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In this government, this Progressive Conservative government, we like to hear from voices all across the province and from everyone. We are open to hearing from the Pembina Institute with regard to carbon capture and storage, the alternative and renewable energy framework. [interjections] We're not going to apologize for getting input from many different places, whether it be the Calgary university, the University of Alberta, or the many different institutions that provide us with very good input into policy.

Mr. Hale: Mr. Speaker, taxpayers are asking and are confused. We see the government giving money to Pembina when they like what Pembina says on one issue and then trying to ban Pembina from hearings when they don't like what it says on another issue. Will the minister agree that this government has no business funding any activist organizations?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, that particular member obviously has a problem with freedom of speech. [interjections] But let me

say this. When we have different groups that can provide us with policy input from all spectrums, we look to that, and we're going to continue to do that. We're not going to apologize for that because we end up with better policies when we get to hear from a broad spectrum of Albertans.

The Speaker: Shall we continue with question period? Okay. Let's go Edmonton-McClung, followed by Little Bow.

Public Service Pension Plans

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board recently announced changes to four Alberta public-sector plans: the public service pension plan, PSPP; the management employees pension plan, MEPP; the local authorities pension plan, LAPP; and the special forces pension plan, SFPP. Many in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung are concerned with these changes. To the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board: how can this change possibly benefit Alberta's economic future and public-sector employees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The changes that have been announced reflect the government's commitment to preserve defined benefit plans and also to get them on a sustainable path so that they're able to keep the promises that have been made both to the current and the future plan holders. We're enacting a contribution rate cap as well to make sure that the plans are affordable both to the taxpayer and to the plan members. Some of these plans cost up to 25 per cent of salaries. That's among the highest rates in Canada. We're planning on giving plan managers better tools to manage their plan.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Alberta's public-sector pension plan is facing unfunded liabilities of \$7.4 billion, what is your ministry's plan to solve this challenge?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, the current unfunded liabilities will be paid down over a period of 12 years. What the changes will do is reduce risk by targeting the cost-of-living increases so that they're paid out when the plans are financially able to do so and by reducing the early retirement subsidies to make the plans more affordable. The government is committed to living within its means, and the changes we're making mean that the public-sector pension plans will be doing exactly the same.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Xiao: Sure, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will your ministry reduce the risk of unfunded liabilities in the future?

Mr. Dallas: Well, Mr. Speaker, the changes will help reduce risk and make the plans affordable, as I mentioned, for plan members and for taxpayers. To ensure that the changes have a chance to take effect, we're going to have to put a moratorium on benefit improvements until 2021. This allows the plans to get back on track financially before handing over sponsorship of the plans to employers and labour groups. Those that bear the risks should have the responsibility for how they're governed, and it's why the plans will be jointly sponsored as early as 2016.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Bridge Maintenance and Repair

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March I raised very serious concerns about this government's downloading of bridge files, the cost of maintenance, to the municipalities. The minister confirmed his answer, and it was to "save some money." Some of these bridges are between 50 and 75 years old, and the cost of the repairs is well beyond the allotted MSI fund grants. To the Minister of Transportation: is poor fiscal management the reason this government is passing the buck when it comes to maintaining rural Alberta bridges?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, in tough times we have to make some tough choices over here, but I can assure the member that every rural municipality I've met with in the last four months asked me the same question. Yes, while we zero funded the STIP program in Budget 2013, we increased the basic transportation grant by \$51 million. This money allows the municipalities to spend the money where they see their own priorities fitting.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 172 bridges located in the MD of Taber, with a replacement value of about \$100 million, and given that in 25 years an average of \$2 million a year to replace the infrastructure will only cover half of it just for this one municipality, what is this government's plan to ensure that municipalities have the necessary funding in proper place to return to rural bridges in rural Alberta? Minister of Municipal Affairs, any thoughts on that?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we find municipalities extremely important partners in maintaining infrastructure, providing for growth in this province, and this year this government, through Municipal Affairs, will give a combined \$1.24 billion in basic municipal transportation grants and MSI in support of that infrastructure, which can go to bridges, to roads, to other infrastructure that's absolutely necessary for continuing to grow our communities.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, they're just downloading the funds back to the municipalities. It's about as plain as it can be.

Who's going to deal with this? The new Premier, by chance? Anybody over there?

The Speaker: The Municipal Affairs minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to work with this group of people because I know everybody on this side of the floor and in these benches is committed to working with our municipalities. They're doing it each and every day. Whether that's helping to repair flood damage, to take care of erosion control so that we can protect infrastructure, or whether it's helping municipalities build brand new infrastructure, schools, and other things, every day we work with municipalities to make sure that we have strong communities.

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

Pharmaceutical Information Network

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue my inquiries into information and data management programs' costs and outcomes in this province such as the \$83 million for API 3, the \$372 million for AFFRCS, my attention turns to health. The Alberta pharmaceutical information network, e-prescribe, has been going on for 15 years, the implementation plagued by multiple contractors, performance quality and adoption issues. To the Minister of Health: when will this project be completed, delivering on the outcomes intended?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly not agree with the hon. member that the pharmaceutical information network is not a success. It is, in fact, one of the biggest success stories in our health care system. This series of projects began, in fact, in 2009, specifically the e-prescribe product, with the objective of converting from paper to electronic prescriptions for all Alberta pharmacists. Earlier versions of the PIN project began in 2007, notably the V3, and that project . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the project has had a sequence of versions or multiple time frame extensions, can the minister identify the financial impact and the project cost over time?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, the PIN project began, as I said, a number of years ago with the goal of moving Alberta from paper to electronic prescriptions. In fact, today a number of initiatives within that project have been successfully completed and implemented across the province. The PIN project is working today with pharmacists on ways to further automate their practice, to connect them in their collaboration with physicians and other providers, working as part of a team. We would expect that this project will continue well into the future with other refinements that connect what goes on in a pharmacy with Alberta Netcare and with the activity . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final sup.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the primary outcome of this information technology project has been to improve cost efficiency and patient safety, how will these outcomes be measured to justify the significant albeit undisclosed expenditure?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The PIN project and all of the other information technology projects that we undertake in Health are not focused on the issue of saving money. They are focused on improving patient outcomes, and most importantly they are focused on improving the experience of our constituents as they interact with the health care system. Medication data is vitally important both in dispensing medication in the pharmacy environment and in guiding the work of nurse practitioners and physicians and other health professionals that work together as part of a team. So the short answer to the hon. member's question is that we certainly will not be measuring this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Calgary-Shaw, followed by Calgary-East.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Contract

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I asked the Minister of Transportation about the construction schedule of the southwest Calgary ring road, and I thank him for the clarifying letter he sent. Unfortunately, it appears that all the interchanges required to finish the south leg of the road along highway 22X are going to be packaged into a second and larger P3 project, and this will, I quote, provide the most value to Albertans. The sheer size of this massive P3 project will inevitably limit the number of vendors that could even compete for the job. Can the minister explain how limiting the number of proposals will translate into higher value for Albertans?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assume the question was about P3s. We do plan on separating that into two different projects and two different P3 projects because we've done all of our ring road projects so far on P3s. They have to show value for dollars, or we don't accept the contract. We've saved \$2.5 billion using P3 contracts to build the ring roads.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that traffic counts justify action now rather than waiting for the completion of the land transfer agreement and given that smaller projects will attract a more competitive bidding process, providing much more value to taxpayers regardless of if it's another P3, will the minister agree to tender a separate request for proposal for only the south leg along highway 22X?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if I really follow that, but to do a project efficiently, it's better to do it in one project as little pieces along the way. Until we're assured of the land transfer, we wouldn't want to invest any dollars and then not have the deal go through.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What specific evidence does the minister have that suggests taxpayers will receive greater value by completing the final 26-kilometre stretch of this road, all the way from Glenmore Trail down to Macleod Trail in the south, as one project as opposed to two, and will he make the evidence public by tabling it here in this House?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's confusing. I just said that we would do it in two projects, so I'm not sure what he was saying there. We've had great success with P3 projects on the ring roads, and sometimes it's better not to have them too big at one time. That's why we split it into two different projects. One piece of that project is totally in the Tsuu T'ina Nation land, and the other piece is in land that we've already acquired title to, so we could start that project sooner, as soon as we are confident we received that land.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, the time for question period has now elapsed. Could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to one introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it's an absolute honour today to rise and inform the House that we're joined in the members' gallery by a very passionate advocate for children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, a member of my constituency from the town of High Level. Not only does she serve as a volunteer on the northwest fetal alcohol spectrum disorder network, but she has literally opened her home to care for hundreds of children, opened her heart as well for their care and actually adopted many, many children. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House Mrs. Sonya Schmidt, who I believe is in the gallery up there. I would ask members to give her the warm welcome and the thanks of this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will resume with Members' Statements, starting with Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Writing-on-Stone Park Internship Program

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "When do we get there? When do we get there?" That's what kids say when they are excited about getting to places they know they're going to love. That's what the Writing-on-Stone provincial park staff want of their innovative program in southern Alberta. So what's the big deal? Well, it connects visitors to a unique First Nations cultural experience.

Writing-on-Stone provincial park, also known as Áísínai'pi in Blackfoot – a direct translation meaning "it is pictured" – is an important place for First Nations people, who have visited the spiritually significant landscape for thousands of years. In the summer of 2013 two Blackfoot interns were hired at the park to share their culture and stories with visitors and interacted with more than 4,000 visitors over the summer.

The First Nations interpretation internship program recently won gold in the federal-provincial-territorial category at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada/Deloitte public-sector leadership awards in February, as the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation said, an award that recognizes organizations that have demonstrated outstanding leadership by taking bold steps to improve Canada through advancements in public policy and management.

Congratulations to the staff who joined us here today and were introduced by the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. I ask them all to stand again. Congratulations to Juanita Tallman, First Nations interpretation internship supervisor; Suzanne Lodermeier, visitor centre co-ordinator; and, of course, Aaron Domes, head of visitor services, on the success of this program. Thank you for your commitment to preserving our aboriginal cultural heritage and making Writing-on-Stone provincial park a place people can't wait to get to.

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

Open Postsecondary Educational Resources

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to call attention to an announcement made this morning that will directly benefit Alberta postsecondary students. In the last several days and weeks many of us have heard from these students. The Alberta Students' Executive Council held its lobby week with government and opposition members last month, and this week the Council of Alberta University Students also met with many of us to discuss their concerns. That's why our government is pleased today to announce the open educational resources initiative, a new approach to examining educational materials available in our universities, colleges, and technical institutes.

Students have told us they are concerned with the cost of education, and we know that textbooks and other related materials are part of that. Mr. Speaker, this new initiative will bring together leading experts to examine electronic resources, including, potentially, open-source textbooks and e-textbooks, and how our government can work with the institutions to get them into our classrooms. Being able to access their textbooks electronically will mean lower costs for students. There's also the potential to include new teaching tools such as videos and other multimedia products.

Earlier this year student groups in Alberta came together to release Ignite: Ideas for Post-Secondary Education. In their report students called on the government to examine open educational resources, and I'm proud to say that our government is meeting their concerns. This process will be headed by a committee of experts which is already co-chaired by a senior academic leader from Olds College and an international expert professor from Athabasca University. Students and other experts will be added to this committee soon.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes in putting students first in Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

2:50

Sonshine Emergency Shelter

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My statement today will make you uncomfortable, and it should. It's about some of the most vulnerable children and women in our province. I'm going to tell you about the children and mothers who reside at Sonshine Centre, a second-stage women's shelter in Calgary-Currie. The women and their children at Sonshine are there because they are at high risk of serious physical harm or fatality.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homicide in Calgary, approximately 25 per cent. It costs our city \$1.7 million to respond to a single homicide. Now consider this. Sonshine Centre's annual budget is \$1.4 million. That \$1.4 million provides a safe home to approximately 45 families who are at risk for fatality and serious injury. They can stay for up to a year and rebuild their lives. In this context, preventing a single case of domestic homicide has not only far-reaching financial implications, but more importantly the unlimited possibilities of mitigating the effects on our children will have a direct impact on social costs, high school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, school failure, and psychological disorders.

Ninety-five per cent of Sonshine's families typically arrive from 21-day emergency shelters. It is important to know that emergency shelters are funded by our government whereas Sonshine is privately funded, like all but two second-stage shelters in Alberta. Unfortunately, this means that when a housing unit becomes

available, up to 40 families will be on the list to occupy that one space.

Sonshine has recently developed a children's centre. It is Canada's first licensed and accredited child care centre that offers therapeutic programming and child development strategies and interventions that aim to end the intergenerational cycle of violence in families.

Sylvan Lake Kraft Hockeyville 2014 Award

Mrs. Towle: In 1972 Team Canada beat Russia with Henderson's history-making goal, and 1972 was also the year that Sylvan Lake opened its hockey arena, affectionately known as the Barn. Fast-forward 40 years, and on January 14, 2014, shortly after midnight the Barn's 40-year-old roof collapsed due to heavy snowfall.

News of the Sylvan Lake arena's roof collapse spread across Canada. Kevin Putnam, a Sylvan Lake resident living in Whitehorse, nominated Sylvan Lake for Kraft Hockeyville 2014. Lakers, local communities, and supporters rallied. The town of Bentley's mayor pledged support. The Innisfail Eagles, the town of Innisfail, and the Red Deer Rebels quickly joined in. Community leaders and volunteers took action. Mayor Sean McIntyre and our town council opened the schools and held voting rallies for everyone to support the arena. The community came together. The pride was clear.

On March 8 the top 16 were announced. E-mails of support came from all over Canada. The community grew louder and stronger. On March 22 300 Lakers attended the community centre reveal party, and during the Battle of Alberta hockey game Sylvan Lake was in the top two, with over 1.5 million votes. More votes came in from all over the world: Yukon, Ontario, even from Sylvan Lake residents wintering in Costa Rica, and, of course, Kevin and his crew from Whitehorse. April 5: anticipation, excitement, and the Boom Chucka Boys revved up the crowd as we waited for the announcement. Lakers held their breath. Then loud cheers and tears as Sylvan Lake, with over 5 million votes, became the first western Canada winner of Kraft Hockeyville. Mr. Speaker, this brought over a hundred thousand dollars to the community and a pretty cool hockey game to a small central Alberta town.

Tragedy brings communities together, tragedy can triumph, and Sylvan Lake is a clear example of that. I am proud to be an Albertan, but I'm even prouder to share this experience with my friends and neighbours in Sylvan Lake. On behalf of all Lakers, thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I have 50 more of the over 4,000 postcards our office has received to restore consistent and reliable funding for postsecondary education in Alberta. These were collected by the Non-Academic Staff Association of the University of Alberta. I have the copies here.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a publication from the *Stettler Independent* from Mr. Will Verboven, commenting that Alberta is the only province in Canada that does not extend benefits to farm workers – that is,

occupational health and safety and WCB – and on the commitment under Premier Redford to a mandatory extension of those benefits during her term.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the requisite number of copies of the public responses I received via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and telephone in response to my request for information and input regarding Motion 504, which is coming up next week, in regard to increasing penalties and fines to deter excessive speeding and dangerous driving.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe you have two tablings.

Mr. Webber: I do, Mr. Speaker, yes. The first is a collection of three articles regarding the horrific taping of a cat's and a dog's muzzles that happened in Calgary in January of this year. The one article, from the CBC, and the two from the *Calgary Herald* describe the disturbing details of this incredible cruelty. I would like to table the requisite number of copies.

As well, I am tabling five copies of the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' core values and core beliefs, in which they indicate that they will continue to push for improvements and ongoing review of the animal welfare legislation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure, followed by Little Bow.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the 2009-2012 capital plan and the 2010-2013 capital plan, both of which include the federal building.

I also table the requisite number of copies of the personal web page of the Member for Airdrie. He makes it clear on his page that he was on the Treasury Board during those years. [interjection]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite copies of an e-mail I received from Tom Filgas from Lethbridge just going on about how he's not happy about what goes on in the province. He thinks that we should have royalty rates of up to 25 per cent for the oil sands. I'm just passing that forward.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Little Bow – I'm so sorry. Hon. Member for Airdrie, please. [interjection] Hon. Member for Airdrie, please. That's enough. You're just chattering across the bow like there's no end to it. That's enough. If you have a point of order, stand and raise a point of order. Otherwise, zip it up, please.

Calgary – sorry. Little Bow, did you want to finish your tabling, please?

Mr. Donovan: Well, it looks like I'm going to take over Calgary sometime with "Little Bow" and "Calgary" all the time.

I'm just passing that on. I told him I'd table them last fall. I forgot, so I'm making sure I don't forget this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I believe we are now going to proceed with points of order. I think we have at least three, plus a clarification which I shall offer after the points of order.

Let's go with the first point of order, which I believe was the Government House Leader at 2:02 p.m. Your point of order and citation, please.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you don't mind, I wouldn't mind dealing with both of the points of order at the same time, at 2:02 and 2:03. They're both relevant as the same point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there were actually three that you raised: one at 2:02, one at 2:03, and, I believe, one at 2:18. I think they were all similarly related. They were all more or less on the same topic.

Mr. Campbell: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I'll cite 23(h) and (i) in the standing orders. The Leader of the Official Opposition in her questioning to the Minister of Infrastructure, I believe, was quite deliberate in her attempts to make allegations against another member. I would suggest that the leader actually impugned the integrity of the minister in her questioning, and I would suggest that she also brought the Minister of Energy into her preambles, saying, you know, that the Minister of Energy was also using government business to put forward her bid for the leadership. I look at (h), and I also look at (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member."

I'd also look at *Beauchesne* 409(7) and (8) on page 121. "A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it." Section (8) says, "A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again."

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition asked a question. She asked it a second time. You did not allow her to ask it a third time. Again, her motives, I think, were very clear on this. You have made it very clear in this House that – and you've given her, I think, very good leeway in the sense that the opposition has some leeway in asking the questions, but the questions should be about policy. There's no doubt that the questions and the statements from the Leader of the Official Opposition were not about policy. They were about the leadership race. Again, there are no policies within this House that dictate what cabinet ministers should do in running for the leadership race, but I can say that there are policies within cabinet, within the PC Party.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Official Opposition remove her remarks and apologize to the two ministers involved.

The Speaker: Is anybody responding?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most absurd points of order that has ever been raised in this House. [interjections] I know there are some prospective leadership candidates yelling on the other side. I note that.

This is the exact same line of questioning – the exact same line of questioning – that was put forward in 2011 regarding the leadership aspirations of several cabinet ministers that were out in the media saying that they were thinking of running for leader and so forth. At that time Speaker Kowalski did not breathe one word of exception, one word that it was inappropriate because, in fact, it is appropriate. It's entirely appropriate for several reasons.

First off, there were no allegations against the member. The question was very clear. I have the question in front of me. You will note it in the Blues as such:

The Minister of Infrastructure must know that when he is meeting with construction companies who want to build hospitals and schools, it [can be] unclear if he's doing [so] as the Minister of Infrastructure or as a PC leadership candidate fishing for donations to his campaign. Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership, or will he resign from cabinet and stop [campaigning on taxpayer dollars]?

It's very clearly a question. It very clearly involves government policy and spending of monies and so forth and deals with a conflict of interest, which we deal with all the time in question period and talk about with regard to government officials, elected and unelected. In absolutely every House in the Westminster system that's how it's done. It's a regular course of business: the ethics of government, conflicts of interest, making sure that there aren't any, making sure that people are accountable if there are. That's our job. It's certainly the job of the Official Opposition leader, and it's our job as opposition.

The second question that he referred to was:

She must know . . .

Speaking of the Minister of Energy.

. . . that when she's meeting with executives from major energy companies, it's unclear if she is doing [so] as the Minister of Energy, ensuring [the] responsible development of our resources, or as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations [for her campaign] . . . Will [the minister] confirm today that she's not seeking the PC leadership, or will she resign . . . from cabinet [in order to] stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, just as with the first one, the Official Opposition leader is permitted under our rules to ask if a minister is in a conflict of interest. And in this case there are a lot of people out there that would say, just as they did in 2011, that there is a fine line that we're worried that cabinet ministers might cross by possibly using resources, obviously government resources, with their kilometres allowance and so forth, et cetera, et cetera, and their access and so forth, and possibly pass that grey zone and start campaigning while on government business. That is definitely a possibility.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that we need to make sure we understand that in this House we give specifically the Official Opposition leader but certainly all members a very clear right of free speech in order to ask questions of the government regarding their dealings. This is not an internal party matter. An internal party matter, of course, would deal with asking questions about the president of the PC Party or a fundraiser campaign that they did or something like that. Those are internal party matters.

As the House leader just said – and this is absolutely critical because he said it just now when he was arguing this point of order. He said that we have rules and policies governing this in the cabinet as well as the PC Party. He just said it in his arguments. So we have every right on this side to discuss whether those regulations are there, if they're being followed, and so forth, and if there's a conflict of interest. There is no point of order, and I don't see any reason why the Official Opposition leader should be withdrawing her remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to use the citations of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I would like to start by referencing the criteria that are

available to us on 503 and 504, which the Speaker has often referenced when cautioning us on questions that involve any kind of a political slant. I would offer that on 503 it talks about how a question should not address “any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities,” and on 504 it talks about questions concerning “internal party matters, or party or election” – one presumes they’re party elections – “expenses.”

Now, that prohibition against discussing internal party business is matched, of course, by what we find on page 93, which are the protections around freedom of speech. So it’s always a balance between the freedom of speech that we enjoy in this House, but the balance of it is to not use it to abuse other members in the House.

We, particularly in the opposition, need the protection of freedom of speech so that we can ask the hard questions, sometimes the uncomfortable questions, and call the government members to account. There is nothing in the House of Commons procedures booklet – and I’ll reference 93 – that prohibits us from asking questions on conflict of interest, as my colleague from Airdrie mentioned. I will quote for you. “Though this is often criticized, the freedom to make allegations which the Member genuinely believes at the time to be true, or at least worthy of investigation, is fundamental.” Further, it says, “There would be no freedom of speech if everything had to be proven true before it were uttered.”

We are in a situation currently which I believe is also a difficulty that is caused for the trust of all of the members in this House. Now, whether any member is seen as deliberately or by omission or even perceived to be using the resources of the LAO or of the government, that puts a blight on all of us. The public doesn’t tend to interpret particular names. They just say that all politicians are doing this. So it matters to all of us that we are able to track this down and get to the bottom of it.

In fact, that’s pretty well understood. I’ll reference the LAO, that goes to great lengths to curb any MLA activity before and during an election to make sure that they’re not making use of any kind of government or LAO resources. Websites are shut down, financial books are taken away, that sort of thing. Clearly, the government understands that there can be a relationship between those two things.

What we are dealing with right now is a case of timing and personal choice, which is uncertain, and that is making it difficult for all of us in this House. The solution, in my humble opinion, is fairly simple. Take a week’s leave as a minister if you are considering this – make the consideration, come back, and do whatever you’re going to do – or resign your seat and go off and do what you’re going to do or state that you’re not going to run for it. But at this point, Mr. Speaker, we are in a period of questioning, with uncertain timing, and all of us want to make sure that no member is disparaged unfairly, nor do we want to see someone that is using those resources when they shouldn’t be.

3:10

So 504 and 503 are really restricting us from asking questions about internal party business. Is somebody running for a table officer position, or who’s going to be the president of the party? You know, that is none of the business of what we’re doing here. But it is very much the business of what we are doing here if we are seeing a situation that could be misconstrued or misunderstood or deliberately put out there that a member is using or abusing government or LAO resources for a particular party function.

I believe that if you look at 503 and 504 and you look at it in conjunction with 93, I would argue that the questions that were asked by the members of the Official Opposition were very much

in order. It would help us all if the hon. members on the other side would make their declarations in favour of or make it clear they’re not going to do this because this uncertain timing is creating the grief that we are all experiencing here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Government House Leader very briefly.

Mr. Campbell: I just want to clarify some comments. I sometimes don’t say the right thing as I’m saying it. It’s not a policy of cabinet that you step down as a minister; it’s been the policy of Premiers that have asked their cabinet ministers to step down if they are going to run. When I was here under Premier Stelmach, he made that request of cabinet, and I know that Minister Hancock has made the same request.

Mr. Speaker, we will expect all of our members on this side of the House, especially our cabinet ministers, to do the right thing if they decide to make that choice. I will make it quite clear that there is no race right now. Nobody has declared. Right now we’re in the process of doing government business, and probably the most important piece of government business is passing the budget.

The Speaker: Briefly, Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yeah, briefly. Just in response, I appreciate the clarification. However, again he just referred to the policy of past Premiers and actually referred to Mr. Stelmach. Of course, we saw what happened with the former Premier, that just resigned. She actually followed that advice and did resign on the Premier’s request because she was pursuing it.

The Premier, of course, is the head of the governing party in our system, the head of the executive. It is very much in order to determine whether those policies protect against conflict of interest and indeed whether ministers are following those policies to protect against conflict of interest. Again, I do believe the House leader is proving that point in some ways more effectively than myself.

The Speaker: Is that it? Okay. Thank you.

I gather we’re dealing with all three points of order from the Government House Leader sort of in one here. I listened as attentively as I could, and I took notes as fast as I could to what you were all saying, and I have the benefit of the Blues. The Government House Leader rose three times today on a point of order and summed it all up under 23(h), (i), and possibly obliquely (j). In any event 23 (h) and (i). Let me just remind you of what Standing Order 23 says. Here’s what it says:

23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker’s opinion, that Member . . .

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

In fact, the Government House Leader rose at that point to call attention of the Speaker to a point of order. Three times. What gave rise to that on one occasion was the Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition directing a question to the Minister of Infrastructure in which she basically suggested he might be “fishing for donations to his campaign.” She then went on to possibly suggest that he “stop using taxpayer dollars to campaign.” In her supplemental she went on to say about the Minister of Infrastructure that he was possibly “in a potential

conflict of interest.” Then she went on to say, “as a Premier wannabe looking for corporate donations,” which she directed again to the Minister of Infrastructure. Finally, in reference to the Minister of Infrastructure she suggested that he should “stop campaigning on taxpayer dollars.”

Now, that’s one, two, three, four – at least four. In fact, somewhere in here she also suggested that he is in “a potential conflict of interest.” So that’s what the Blues are telling us.

Now, this is actually a very serious matter, hon. members, because what we have here are allegations by one hon. member against another member, alleging some of the improprieties that I just enunciated. It should be remembered that in this House we have very specific rules about these kinds of statements not being stated because they do in fact tend to advance false or unwavering motives against another member. In fact, such allegations are often interpreted and, in this case, could easily be interpreted as besmirching the reputation of another member. You could also argue that such comments are disparaging to the personal character of another member. You could also conclude that it was somewhat of a personal attack on another member, and I could go on and on.

In short, you cannot make these kind of allegations in this House. If you have a serious allegation, hon. members, against another member, there are processes in place that you can avail yourself of. I won’t take up your time to review them all for you now. I’ve done it many times before. I would ask you and I would caution you to be very careful of the language you use in this House.

I’m well aware that we’re entering a very sensitive time in provincial politics, and that’s why we like to leave party matters outside the doors. But if you have something that suggests that there is some wrongdoing or, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre stated, that resources given to you by taxpayers through the LAO or through a cabinet ministry are possibly being used inappropriately, there are mechanisms to deal with that, and there are very harsh consequences if that in fact is proven to be the case. But to simply stand here and allege these things, I find offensive and I find inappropriate. I would therefore ask that the leader of the loyal opposition refrain from using that particular train of thought in her future questions, and I would caution all members to do likewise.

We’ve had sufficient clarification of this. If necessary I will pursue it further with the Leader of the Official Opposition, asking her to withdraw those comments and perhaps offer an apology if she so wishes as well – both, in my view, would be appropriate – or if someone on her behalf is prepared to do that now, I’d be prepared to receive it now.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Hmm. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, we have to think about whether civil disobedience is a good idea or not. If this were me, I certainly would not withdraw those comments, but seeing that it is from the leader – and I will protect her – I will on her behalf withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That would be the honourable thing to do because that then concludes the matter and allows us to move on to the next point.

Point of Clarification

The Speaker: The next point was raised by the hon. Member for Airdrie, and it was with respect to clarification that was sought when I had to intervene and stop a line of questioning which I felt was violating or perhaps about to violate – take your pick – one of the standing rules that we have in this House. In fact, it’s not only in this House; it’s throughout our Commonwealth parliamentary system.

So let me start by referring you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, wherein a discussion, on page 502, with respect to question period says the following: “Furthermore, a question should not . . . create disorder . . . [should not] concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses.” It’s basically the same point that I raised yesterday when a similar line of questioning was being pursued.

There’s also a reference in *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, on page 122, section 17, where it says, “Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities.”

3:20

Now, during her questions today the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition said the following: “The PC leadership race is under way.” Then she went on. A little further on she says, “A PC leadership candidate [is] fishing for donations to his campaign.” Then she went on to say, “Will the minister confirm today that he is not seeking the PC leadership?” Then she went on to say, “The Minister of Energy also hasn’t ruled out running for the PC leadership.” And she went on to say about the Minister of Energy, “Will she confirm today that she’s not seeking the PC leadership?” So I count at least five references to an internal party matter, because de facto the race for a leader of the PC Party is an internal party matter. You must be a member of that party to participate in that process. Of course, it’s all about electioneering and campaigning and so on.

There’s a reason, hon. members, that you’ve heard me say before why questions about internal party matters are almost automatically ruled out of order. The reason why is because they always create disorder in the House. I’ve told you before, and I’ll tell you again. One of the first fundamentals that a Speaker must uphold to the best of his or her ability is order and control of the House. It’s absolutely fundamental. Yesterday I was very polite when I mentioned that this line of questioning ought be carefully studied so as to not violate the particular rules that I’ve just mentioned to you, and today we had numerous examples of it being violated. My clarification and my admonishment today to whomever is to not engage in questions that concern party matters. They will be ruled out of order every time. Please, let’s refrain from doing that, and I hope that will close the matter.

We will proceed with the legislative policy committee meetings this afternoon, starting at 3:30. It is with regard to Alberta’s Economic Future, where they will be considering the estimates for Innovation and Advanced Education in committee room A, and Resource Stewardship will consider Municipal Affairs in committee room B. At 7 tonight Families and Communities will consider the estimates of Education in committee room A. That is all in accordance with our rules.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:24 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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