



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

Issue 15

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
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Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 58 Wildrose: 17 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 3

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Kubinec	Rowe
Lemke	Sarich
Luan	Stier
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Amery	Khan
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Select Special Ethics Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Rogers

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Blakeman	Leskiw
Eggen	McDonald
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Lemke	

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Brown	Olesen
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Brown	Xiao
Calahasen	Young
Casey	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 9, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray and give thanks to those brave men and women who have served in our military defending our rights and freedoms, and let us give thanks also to those who still serve today. Amen.

Hon. members, life, as we all know, is precious, and when it is lost, all of us are impacted. Therefore, on this day I would ask that all Members of our Alberta Legislative Assembly and all others present here with us today as well as those observing our proceedings in their homes join together as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian military personnel lost in service to their country. In a moment of silent thought and prayer let us remember them and be ever thankful to them all. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may we as a nation be eternally grateful. God bless them all. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

National Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge

The Speaker: Hon. members, today, April 9, 2014, marks the 97th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The Canadian victory at Vimy is considered a defining moment in our history, as we would all know. It was the first time all four divisions of the Canadian Corps attacked together. Accounts of incredible acts of sacrifice and bravery earned Canadians the respect of being a prepared, strong, vibrant, and unstoppable force. Those acts, however, also resulted in over 10,000 Canadians being killed or wounded. Later Brigadier General Arthur Edward Ross famously declared, "In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation."

Hon. members, four former members of this Assembly are known to have fought at Vimy Ridge as follows. Lieutenant Joseph Emmet Stauffer of the 50th Battalion, Alberta regiment, was killed in action on April 10, 1917. He was the Member for Didsbury from 1909 until his death. He served this Assembly as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1913 to 1916.

Major James Robert Lowery of the 49th Battalion, Edmonton regiment, was severely wounded on April 9, 1917. He served this Assembly as the Member for Alexandra from 1913 to 1921.

Captain Joseph Tweed Shaw of the 46th Battalion, Saskatchewan battalion, was wounded at Vimy Ridge. He would return and subsequently serve this Assembly as the Member for Bow Valley from 1926 to 1930.

Lieutenant Hugh Cragg Farthing of the Canadian Army Service Corps was gassed shortly after the ridge was taken, and it took months for him to recover his health. When he did, he served this Assembly as the Member for Calgary from 1930 to 1935.

With our applause and our thanks let us remember their courage and their achievements. [applause]

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Continuing on my train of thought, hon. members, let me say the following. At Vimy Ridge all 48 battalions of the

Canadian Corps rose as one for the first time in the first Great War. From Alberta the 10th, the 31st, the 49th, and the 50th battalions, Canadian Expeditionary Force, all joined battle, and many were killed and others wounded. Today these four units are perpetuated by the Calgary Highlanders, the South Alberta Light Horse, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and the King's Own Calgary Regiment respectively. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, while not raised in Alberta, shares the battle honour of Vimy Ridge 1917.

On this special day in my gallery are the contemporary representatives of two well-known Alberta-based regiments who were at Vimy. They are Major Troy Steele, South Alberta Light Horse; Warrant Officer Kevin Heselton and Master Corporal Sean Sullivan, both of Princess. They are here on behalf of the many with whom they serve. Of note, all three have served in Afghanistan and elsewhere on operational tours overseas. The significance of this battle to our dominion is well known to members of this House and to all Albertans. I would now ask the guests I've just named to please rise and receive our sincere thanks. [Standing ovation]

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ken and Iris Saunders, constituents in Edmonton-Whitemud, are fantastic contributors to our community. In fact, they epitomize contribution to community. Tragically, this last week Iris Saunders, who served as the executive director of EmployAbilities, an organization that serves people with disabilities, discusses barriers to employment, assists employers, and acts as a voice of community advocacy, passed away suddenly. She will be mourned by the entire EmployAbilities family and by the broader community. Both Ken and Iris contributed massively to our community. Iris had an indefatigable attitude. She was always there. She was always willing to contribute and always willing to serve.

In your gallery, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Iris's husband, Ken Saunders, and the Saunders' boys: Ken Jr., Darryl, and Dale. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House, with our thanks for their service. I can tell you that the boys have also followed in the footsteps of their parents and provide great service to our community. We owe an incredible debt of thanks to Iris and a continuing debt of thanks to the Saunders family.

The Speaker: Are there other visitors? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How serendipitous it is that today I have the special privilege to introduce guests on the very day that we pay tribute to those with courage whose lives were lost at Vimy. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Jean-Christophe Fleury, consul general of the republic of France. The consul general is accompanied by his spouse, Ms Hyunsun Shin. This is Mr. Fleury's first official visit to Alberta since taking up his post as consul general in Vancouver last October. Mr. Fleury has played and will continue to play a valuable role in strengthening the friendship between our jurisdictions.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and France have a long-standing trade, investment, and cultural relationship. Nearly 15 years ago we created the Francophone Secretariat to enhance ties with our Alberta francophone community, a community that consists of

approximately 390,000 Albertans of French descent and over 81,000 francophones who reside in this province today. Together we will continue to work to build on our ties so that our jurisdictions can thrive today, tomorrow, and into the future. I would now ask Consul General Fleury to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly parents of two of our current pages. Firstly, the parents of Stephanie Nedoshytko, who are here to observe Stephanie in her role as a page during her last session here at the Legislature. Joining us today in your gallery is her father, Ihor Nedoshytko, and her mother, Mary Nedoshytko. Ihor is a retired teacher and spends his time playing in various local bands. Mary is a teacher at Holy Family Catholic school. They are both largely involved in the Ukrainian cultural community. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to the members of the Assembly is the parents of Tierra Stokes. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery is her father, Dave Stokes, and her mother, Brenda Stokes. Dave is a building contractor and an avid hockey player. Brenda is an instructor at NAIT, my alma mater. They are here to observe Tierra in her role as training-development page during her last session here at the Legislature. Tierra leaves us after three years as a page to attend Mount Allison this fall. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. It is with great privilege that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the committed volunteers who have dedicated themselves to making Alberta a hate-free province. These volunteers are part of the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, who have been working with the community, government, and police for over a decade to help educate Albertans about hate crimes and a potentially divisive impact on their communities. The goals of this committee are to educate and build communities that work together with coordinated and standardized policies and services to make every Albertan feel included in this great province.

I'd ask each one of them to please rise as I read their name: Chevi Rabbit, this year's Alberta hate crimes youth award winner – I had the privilege of meeting him last year – Laveia Schug, Chevi's mother; Adam Bautista, this year's Alberta hate crimes youth arts award winner; Roger Bautista, Adam's father; Mirande Alexandre; Nicholas Ameyaw; Ayesha Mian; Christine Rapp; Tatiana Wugalter; Sofia Yaqub; Stephen Camp; of course, Dr. Kristopher Wells; Edmonton police superintendent, Kevin Galvin; and Natasha Goudar, also from the Edmonton Police Service. Please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Your second introduction.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction today is of two constituents from the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Acadia, Sue and Maureen Higgins, daughters of the late Sue Higgins known to many of us as a

member of Calgary city council from '77 to '83 and '86 to 2001. The late Sue Higgins, who passed away on February 16, was also a constituent of mine who I knew. I remember many colourful conversations and the colourful greetings when I met her, knocking at her door in 2007. Leading her legacy, of course, in my constituency is Sue Higgins Arena as well as Sue Higgins dog park. Maureen works with AltaLink, and Sue works for Alberta Health Services. Both of these incredible ladies are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to welcome a school group from Calgary-Glenmore. I would ask the band members from the Calgary Girls' School to please stand. They are joined today by their teachers, Mr. Quan Le, Ms Judy Byrne, Ms Eva Erfle, Ms Jenelee Jones, and Ms Emily Coady. The school has students from across the city of Calgary, and it is a wonderful example of the choice in our education system. Welcome to the Legislature, ladies.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two members of Chinook local 29 of the Alberta Teachers' Association. This local represents approximately 400 teachers employed by Christ the Redeemer Catholic school division, working in schools in Canmore, Okotoks, High River, Drumheller, Strathmore, Brooks, and Oyen as well as the very popular centre for learning online, which services students across the province. Later this year Chinook local 29 will welcome teachers from Clear Water Academy as that school joins their school division. Today the two members representing Chinook local 29 are Joel Windsor, the local staff representative at Notre Dame Collegiate in High River; and Shauna Baillie, the local staff representative at Holy Spirit Academy in High River. Joel has assured me that he's not here wearing his second hat today, which is as a local organizer for the Alberta Party, but I always enjoy our discussions when we do talk about politics. I invite them to please stand and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Marilyn Koren and her daughter Jamie Sullivan. Delonna Sullivan, Jamie's daughter, was seized without an apprehension order and died in foster care six days later, after removal from her home. This Friday is the three-year anniversary of this sad tragedy. Jamie and Marilyn were successful in having the publication ban on saying Delonna's name lifted. In fact, they've been touring the country as advocates for all children in Canada. They're here to be the voice of Delonna and to encourage us to improve the lives of all Alberta children. I would ask Marilyn and Jamie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by West Yellowhead.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Casey McCarthy. Casey is heavily involved in the Self Advocacy Federation, the Special Olympics, and countless other organizations. Later this month she will be travelling to British Columbia to take part in an autism conference. She's also been invited to take part in the Miss British Columbia Pageant, where she will be the first candidate with autism in the competition's history. I would now like to ask Casey to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and introduce to you and through you a constituent and a good friend of mine from West Yellowhead. Seated in the members' gallery is JoAnn Race from Hinton. JoAnn loves politics and attends every regular and standing council meeting for the town of Hinton, and I know that she keeps the local council on their toes. JoAnn also spent 30 years teaching first aid in the coal mines of Hinton and also working for St. John. She's a dedicated wife and mother and a proud grandmother. She is a great supporter of mine, and she doesn't hesitate to tell me what she thinks. I'd ask JoAnn to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Mill Woods, and that will be it.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Laura McDonald, a Hand Hills resident, mother, and housewife on her first visit to this Chamber. Laura is my Hanna constituency assistant. She is a great community-minded person. Laura was instrumental in the Hand Hills community's reception of a \$50,000 cheque from the UFA's get and give program. Laura, would you please rise and stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you my guests from Ironworkers local 720. Leonard Raboud and George Papineau are both business representatives for local 720, while Coltren Starblanket and Shea Robillard are apprentices. On February 4 the two apprentices along with a larger group of workers were told that they were being replaced by Croatian temporary foreign workers and sent home that same day. Because of considerable public pressure their employer eventually promised to rehire the apprentices; however, to this day many have not been rehired, including Coltren. Coltren is a second-year apprentice still looking to get the hours necessary for his trade. I would now like my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I feel obligated to introduce her again because she's one of my constituents and my boss: Sofia Yaqub. She's a vibrant member of the community

and in lots of women's and seniors' programs. So please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, as we've shown over and over again, AHS is a complete shambles. Wait times have never been worse, and every day we learn about new examples of bureaucratic excess. Today we learned that an Alberta Health Services executive vice-president was restructured out of her job, handed almost a million dollars in executive pensions, and hired back the very next day on a sole-source consulting contract, making a quarter of a million dollars a year. Will the Premier admit that AHS is a complete failure?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, what I will admit and what every member on the government side of this House will admit is that there are a hundred thousand people in Alberta Health Services who are doing an excellent job every day delivering care to Albertans across this province.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the once again grandiose claims of the hon. Leader of the Opposition the fact of the matter is that from time to time organizations, including government, turn to people with specific and specialized expertise to do a job that cannot be done using internal resources. I don't know the details of this particular contract, but I know that's how . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to provide the Health minister the details. Pam Whitnack, former executive vice-president at AHS, collected almost \$350,000 in executive coaching contracts in an 18-month period. That was after she got her \$853,000 supplementary executive pension. Meanwhile dialysis patients in Athabasca, Red Deer, Brooks, and Lacombe can't get timely access to life-saving treatment. Can the Health minister explain why people who are waiting for necessary treatment have to be second place to executive coaching?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say about being someone who would be on the other side of this House is that it must be wonderful to speculate and to make grandiose claims and to be accountable for absolutely nothing. [interjections].

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the issue is oversight of financial administration within Alberta Health Services, and we have very strong processes that are in place within AHS. We have an Audit and Finance Committee that includes representation from the office of the Auditor General. [interjections] We have a strong internal audit function. We have the tools and the processes in place to be accountable.

The Speaker: Let's listen to the answers, please.

Let's have the question.

Ms Smith: You know who's responsible for absolutely nothing? This Health minister.

From April 2012 until October 2013 AHS spent over \$600,000 on executive coaching for scores of vice-presidents, senior vice-presidents, executive vice-presidents, and executive directors. Meanwhile Alberta seniors were ripped away from their families,

denied baths, and fed horrible food. To the Premier: will he admit that this Health minister is a failure, that AHS is a disaster, and will he do something, anything, to give Albertans some reason to believe that this disgusting mess can actually be fixed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what I will say to Albertans is that we have probably the best Health minister we could have in this province, somebody who has a background in health policy, who understands the system and is working hard every day to make sure that system works even better for Albertans.

What I'll also say to Albertans is that I had the opportunity to be at Ronald McDonald House this morning and to talk with families, who were telling me how well the health system worked in their time of need, for their children. We have a health system that works every day for Albertans. These hon. members would suggest that the health system is broken and not working. The reality is that for the most part it works well every day, and we're going to be working hard to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Smith: If that's the best you've got, Premier, that doesn't inspire confidence in Albertans.

Federal Building Redevelopment Plan

Ms Smith: A few days ago Albertans were treated to the spectacle of two cabinet ministers claiming to have killed the same bad project 14 months apart. Now, Albertans instinctively know that both stories can't be true, but we'll just have to accept that somehow the Premier's penthouse was a zombie that came back to life so that it could be killed twice. So let me start with an easy question to the minister who last killed the sky palace. It's been two weeks since we first found out about this very bad idea. Just how much taxpayer money was wasted on it?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will say to the hon. member that in the same way that sometimes you have to remind the opposition more than once to behave and sometimes, in fairness, you have to remind the government more than once to behave in this House, the same thing actually can happen in a ministry, too. The fact is that we're both telling the truth. I can assure you that the hon. minister is telling the truth. I can assure you that the item was killed in January. They're very infatuated with something that didn't happen. [interjections] I think at some point Albertans would want them to be discussing something that did happen because that's actually in the public interest.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. First supplemental, preferably with no interruptions.

Ms Smith: Albertans want to know how an idea as bad as the Premier's sky palace could have gotten as far along as it did, and the minister didn't answer the question. The documents suggest that almost \$200,000 was spent just on the design phases of this project, and no one wants to fess up about how this bad idea got as far as it did. To the Premier: if the Treasury Board isn't carefully watching projects, how do we know that someone else's executive assistant isn't making million-dollar changes to projects after they've already been approved?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Again, without interruption, please.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I took so long correcting the misinformation of the first question that I didn't

actually get to the legitimate part, so I thank you for that part. I've asked my staff to give a number on how much was spent on the planning for what ultimately didn't happen. That's a legitimate question. Thank you for that. It's refreshing.

I can tell you what. This didn't happen. Albertans want to know that. That's part of the process. When we build projects, we kick around different ideas. [interjections] Some of the ideas we kick around don't work. We most often reject bad ideas. This is an example of the system working.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you object to something being said, stand up and raise a point of order. Otherwise, please, no more interjections, no more talking across the bow, all right? I've already had it, and we're only at the five-minute mark.

Hon. leader, you deserve another question.

Ms Smith: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Still didn't hear an answer in all of that. But the key document about this bad idea was a memo to Peter Watson, the current deputy minister of the cabinet. The memo details the penthouse, the government alumni lounge, and the special elevators to bypass all of the opposition floors. Peter Watson sets the agenda for cabinet, sets the agenda for Treasury Board, and he was fully briefed on this very bad idea. It seems impossible to believe that he didn't tell the cabinet. Why is it that no one in the cabinet had the integrity to do the right thing and say no to this very bad idea?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the member is talking about documents that are made public, and the fact is that change orders don't typically go to cabinet. In fact, you know, if you want to talk about accountability, perhaps the leader could ask the person sitting on her immediate right – I tabled the documents in this House yesterday showing that he was on Treasury Board at least one and possibly two years when this item was discussed – and ask him. The fact is that he would know that not all change orders of projects actually go to Treasury Board. This didn't happen, and that's . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. A point of order is noted, by Airdrie, at approximately 2 o'clock, just now.

Let's go on. The hon. Member for Highwood and Leader of the Opposition for her third and final main set of questions.

Ms Smith: Funny how he got the change orders for our office space but not for the Premier's penthouse.

2:00

Ministers' Activities

Ms Smith: I'm going to ask some careful questions about potential conflicts of interest and seek reassurance for Albertans. The race to choose the next Premier is under way. Many Albertans are concerned that cabinet ministers may end up in apparent conflicts while they undertake their duties to pursue that job. For example, the Energy minister must know that her routine meetings with energy companies will look bad if these companies later donate to her campaign. Will the Energy minister confirm today that she is not in the race to become Premier, or will she resign to prevent the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested that the leader seems to be so focused on leadership. What I'm focused on is getting our budget passed, the legislative session, and

working on the important job that we're doing in Energy. For the last couple of weeks I've met with energy ministers across this country, making sure that we're getting market access across the nation. That is what I am focused on.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Human Services minister has also mused about becoming Premier. Yesterday he rushed out an announcement on changes to children in care even though this was days before the deadline that he'd given to the opposition and others to give him comments about that. The timing has a very unfortunate appearance. Will the Human Services minister confirm today that he is not in the race for Premier, or will he avoid the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and resign his position from cabinet?

Mr. Campbell: Point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a point of order by the Government House Leader at 2:02. I suspect it's going to be something to do with the internal party matters, the issue which we discussed on Monday, which we discussed again yesterday. So please be careful of your questions.

Let's have a short answer from the hon. minister and then see where the third one goes.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has a very rather undignified appearance, if the member so wants to know, is that lake-of-fire party over there trying to zig one day, zag the other day. You can't be two things at the same time.

On this side of the House we're working, we're getting things done, and we're protecting everyday Albertans. [interjections]

Mr. Anderson: Point of order. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members. [interjections] Hon. Member for Airdrie. [interjections] Hon. Member for Airdrie. [interjections] Airdrie. Hon. Member for Airdrie, hon. Minister of Human Services, please look at me. This way. Okay? All right.

Hon. members, you can see why there is a specific rule, a citation, in fact, in two different parliamentary books that specifically forbids, discourages, and otherwise counsels members to not use question period to raise issues of an internal party nature. Part of the reason is because on many occasions, in fact most occasions, it results in what you've just seen so far, three points of order and then some bantering across the bow, the Human Services minister with the Member for Airdrie and then Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, louder than not, perhaps others, and I expect that there might be some on the government side.

Let's be reminded what these rules are. Otherwise, I'm going to have to intervene, and unfortunately the clock will be eaten up accordingly. The choice is yours. It's not my rule, hon. members. It's your rule.

Now let's go on with the final supplemental.

Ministers' Activities

(continued)

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education minister, that comment was directed at you, too.

That brings me to the Minister of Justice. He also indicated that he'd like to become Premier. He even tried to throw the Finance minister under the bus. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting a Member

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie, it's hard to hear what the question is when you're persisting to talk during your own leader's question. Please. I've asked you kindly. I may not be so kind on another occasion. Let's give the floor to your leader. She's earned the right for this question, and we've all earned the right to hear it.

Hon. leader, would you please give us your question again?

Ministers' Activities

(continued)

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all saw how quickly the Justice minister reversed his cuts to the GPS monitoring program at least for the next six months, until the next Premier is chosen. Will the Justice minister confirm today that he is not in the race for Premier, or will he avoid the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and resign his position from cabinet?

Mr. Denis: I first rise on a point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I think this will be the last of them, so I invite you to offer a brief answer, and then let's move on.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. Access to justice, safe streets, safe communities, the government business, Mr. Speaker: that is my priority. It's time that we stopped talking about party matters in this manner in this House and stick to the business of the government.

I also have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, that is the fourth point of order.

Let us go on with Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition.

LGBTQ Student Supports

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gay-straight alliances are student-led organizations that provide a safe environment for LGBTQ youth and their straight allies. On Monday this PC government had a chance to shed its shameful, homophobic legacy by supporting Motion 503. Instead, 22 PC members caused the defeat of the motion by voting against human rights and respect for LGBTQ youth. It seems like the bigger lake of fire is over there. The Premier said he would have voted for Motion 503, but he didn't. I was there, the only leader who voted for this, as did all the Liberal MLAs. To the Premier: why didn't you lead your caucus by example and ensure that the motion passed?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last time I checked, Monday afternoon is private members' business, and in private members' business the tradition of the House is to have private members debate private members' motions and vote as private members on those motions. Sometimes when a motion is totally egregious, against government policy, members are encouraged to consider government policy when they vote. But private members' business is private members' business, and members are encouraged to debate issues fully, sometimes with competing values, as this one was, and then come to a conclusion and vote.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this particular issue was not important to this Premier.

Human rights are universal, not local and not up to the whim of some school board official or principal. What's required here is leadership. Alberta students support gay-straight alliances. The Alberta Teachers' Association supports them. The mayor of Edmonton supports them. But the Minister of Education himself stood up and voted against gay-straight alliances. Mr. Speaker, the credibility of a welcoming and inclusive province is at stake. To the Premier: it seems like you're leading the regressive conservatives. Will you show leadership by bringing in legislation this session and . . .

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the comments that this member has made against our Premier are absolutely ridiculous and insulting. When you're trying to talk about being respectful and caring and welcoming and inclusionary and then make comments like that, you completely defeat the purpose of the spirit of this.

This government and myself and this Premier absolutely, one hundred per cent support GSAs. They're fantastic organizations. We put policies and resources in place to support students and to support schools that do that. This member doesn't trust schools, he doesn't trust teachers, he doesn't trust principals, he doesn't trust our school board trustees, who are duly elected . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Final supplemental.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the credibility of this very minister is at stake, who's charged with protecting Alberta's children in the schools. The evidence clearly shows that in schools that have had GSAs for three years or longer, discrimination, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts are less than half compared to other schools. We're talking about saving and improving the lives of children. The Premier wears a Children First pin. I have to think that this would be important to him. To the Premier: time to decide. Are you a placeholder Premier or a real Premier who puts children first by standing up to the homophobes in your caucus . . .

Mr. Anderson: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely reprehensible for that hon. member to accuse members on this side or any side of the House of being homophobic. I would ask that hon. member to put his record up against mine in terms of putting children first. [interjections] There is no one in this House who has a better record for standing up for children than this hon. member and this Premier, who will use the office of Premier in an appropriate way to do appropriate things at appropriate times because Alberta is not standing still.

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:10

Speaker's Ruling Repetition

The Speaker: Hon. members, sometimes comments like we've just heard from both sides can be interpreted as attacks on a person's character. They don't belong here. I was surprised there wasn't a point of order, and then suddenly Airdrie did rise on a point of order. That was noted at 2:09 p.m.

While I'm on my feet, could I just also please remind all members of our own Standing Order 23(c), that says:

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

(c) persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session.

So please be reminded of what has been decided and how our rules state it should be abided to.

Let us go on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, leader of the ND opposition.

Fort Chipewyan Cancer Incidence

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the government and the Wildrose debate waste and contracts and so on, there are some serious health issues that are being ignored. This government has ignored the warnings of scientific experts who have alerted us to the negative health and environmental effects downriver from Fort McMurray. Doctors have asked for a decade now for a full investigation into elevated cancer rates, yet the government has still not bothered to study the risk factors and how they're contributing to cancer rates. To the Premier: will this government commit to a full study of the links between substances released by industry into our environment and the cancer outbreaks in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member, I hope, is aware, the Alberta cancer registry does conduct very rigorous surveillance of the incidence of cancer across the province, including some very specialized local studies including Fort Chipewyan. As the hon. member knows, the results that were released a few weeks ago did show higher-than-expected rates of specific types of cancer – namely, lung cancer, cervical cancer, and bile duct cancer – in that community. But as the hon. member should also know, the chief medical officer of health has laid out a plan, which he is hoping to have the opportunity to discuss with the community, to address risk factors.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, those sorts of statistical analyses do not do anything for the people in Fort Chipewyan. It's their health that needs to be studied and the link between their health and pollution caused by industry farther upstream. So will the Health minister commit to a clear, comprehensive study of the link between emissions and pollution upstream of Fort Chipewyan and the clusters of cancers that have been found there?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the hon. member in that it is their health; it is the health of the people that live in those communities that we are talking about here today. But where we will disagree – and I think the chief medical officer made it quite clear – is that there are a number of known risk factors for all three types of cancer that have been identified, that are in fact risk factors anywhere in Alberta: smoking as it relates to lung cancer; lack of access to the human papilloma virus vaccine in the case of cervical cancer; and a number of causes, including diabetes and other chronic diseases related to all three types of cancer. Mr. Speaker, the chief medical officer is committed to working with the community to address these risk factors and to discuss . . .

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government has a long history of attempting to ignore and wish away impacts on our water, on our environment, and on human health as a result of oil sands development. There's a long, long record of that. You do it over and over again. The minister is doing it again. He's talking about lung cancer. He's talking about smoking. These are clusters particular to this area. People smoke all over the province, Mr. Minister, not just in Fort Chipewyan. What's your answer?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, my answer is the same answer that was given by the chief medical officer when he released the results of this and talked about what we're going to do. I'm sure that neither the hon. member nor I would want us to think that we're presenting ourselves to Albertans as scientific experts. What we do know is that for all three types of cancer that we're discussing here, there are known risk factors that exist all over the province. Very thankfully, the results this year did not indicate any increase in the prevalence of childhood cancer. As the chief medical officer has said, he's more than willing to sit down and talk to the community about measures that can be taken.

The Speaker: Thank you.

From here on no more preambles to supplementals.

Let's go with Calgary-Foothills, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October last year Bill 207, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Amendment Act, 2013, was passed. It was passed unanimously in this House, and it was granted royal assent immediately thereafter, but seven months later I have yet to hear of any development of the organ and tissue donation agency. My question is to the Minister of Health. What is the status of the implementation of this bill?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm pleased that the hon. member asked the question because later this month we will be unveiling the online registry for organ and tissue donation in Alberta, and at that time all Albertans will have the opportunity to easily and conveniently register their intent to donate. That information will be stored in a database, the organ and donor registry database, maintained by my ministry and made available in care settings across the province when situations arise where an organ or tissue might be made available.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Webber: Thank you. Hon. minister, that's fantastic news, and I appreciate all the work you've done on this and on the registry. But I do want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, given that the key element of the development of this bill is the actual agency, that the registry you just announced is a small portion of this agency. I guess my question is: where are we, Mr. Minister, with the agency?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the key element is making it easy and convenient for Albertans to register their intent to donate organs and tissue, and that step, as I said, is being addressed this month. Later this spring we will see the same opportunity to register the intent to donate made available when

people renew their drivers' licences and their personal identification cards. The agency that the hon. member refers to is in the process of being developed. This is the agency that will oversee both donation activities and transplantation activities in the province, co-ordinating public awareness and education, and we expect the beginnings of that agency to be in place later this year.

Mr. Webber: Fantastic news, Mr. Minister. Thank you very much for that.

Given the fact that there is an average of four people a week that are dying in hospital beds waiting for these organs, can the Minister of Health speed up the process at all with respect to the development of this agency because of the fact that so many people are on their deathbed?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything we can to accelerate the commitments. Again, the agency is going to serve a co-ordination role and an administrative and public education role within the province, but the immediate issue in Alberta is making it easier and more convenient for people to register their intent to donate. That is actually the key to increasing the rate of donation and increasing the number of opportunities that our doctors and nurses and other health professionals have to harvest organs and tissues that have been made available by their fellow Albertans. That is our immediate focus, and we'll of course be following through on all of the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the \$250 million in AHS contracts are \$600,000 in executive coaching fees. Over half of these dollars went to a recently departed AHS VP. We have another document that shows that a sole-source contract worth a quarter of a million dollars was handed to this individual the day after she left the job with AHS. According to your policy sole sourcing shall only be permitted when there is a legitimate need, typically when an unforeseeable situation of urgency exists. Can the minister tell us how an executive coaching contract could ever be considered an urgent priority?

Mr. Horne: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the news release that was blurted out, so to speak, by the opposition shortly before question period, I'm not at all sure that the facts represented in that release are correct, so I have already been in contact with the official administrator of Alberta Health Services to determine that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. There are actually rules and processes, including an internal audit function, that oversee the transactions that take place in AHS with respect to consultants and other procurement, just as there is in government. As minister I expect those to be followed. We presume that they are followed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, first of all, they're FOIP documents, so let's just talk about your processes. Given that AHS policy states, "All

sole sourced Consultant engagements valued at greater than \$25,000 will periodically be reviewed by Senior Executive to evaluate compliance with this policy,” can the minister assure Albertans and table evidence that this policy was followed in that case?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, we discussed this issue yesterday. It is very easy for any member of this House to stand up and to loosely connect facts, whether or not they were acquired through FOIP, and to attempt to lead or mislead, as the case may be, people to a conclusion that may or may not be correct. In this instance there are clear processes within Alberta Health Services, including an Audit and Finance Committee, that includes representation from the office of the Auditor General, that is charged with overseeing these sorts of transactions.

I cannot say with respect to the specific transaction exactly what oversight was exercised, but, Mr. Speaker, we . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

2:20

Mrs. Forsyth: I’ll tell you that it’s not me that’s misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

Given that AHS policy forbids consulting contracts for salaried employees and given that this individual received a contract the day after leaving AHS, how can Albertans believe that the \$250,000 untendered executive coaching contract was anything but a deliberate attempt to reward a senior official with taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member has no regard for the reputation of the individual who received this contract or perhaps anyone else, and that wouldn’t be surprising because this kind of negativity, cynicism, and personal attack is exactly what we’ve observed from across the aisle for the last two and a half years.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that we do take the rules and procedures that we have seriously. We set up oversight mechanisms, we hold people to account, including in this case the official administrator of Alberta Health Services, we presume compliance, and when there is not compliance, we take appropriate action.

Bighorn Sheep Harvest

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the bighorn sheep is an iconic Alberta symbol. Stakeholders have concerns over the serious decline in the quality and quantity of trophy bighorn rams available for harvest. The ESRD assessment indicates that harvest levels need to be adjusted to bring them in line with the management plan. My questions are all for the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister consider longer waiting periods of at least five years after harvest or, better still, introduce a limit of one trophy bighorn harvest in a lifetime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for the question. As an avid hunter and outdoorsman I know he understands the importance of making sure that we have sustainable herds in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, hunting is a long-standing tradition in Alberta, and we are going to work with our department and discuss with stakeholders about different ways to reduce the number of bighorn

sheep that are being harvested. Longer waiting periods and limits on harvesting of trophy rams are among some of those options that are being discussed, and we hope to have those new regs out for this fall.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the House on what measures are being taken to actually increase the habitat for bighorn sheep in Alberta?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, thank you for the question. ESRD is working with Parks Canada and other stakeholders along the eastern slopes, and we’re looking at prescribed burn areas in the mountain areas that will provide sheep habitat. These prescribed burns remove some of the forest cover that is encroaching on winter range, and it turns it back into useful winter range for bighorn sheep.

Not only do we do prescribed burns to help increase habitat, but they also support a program for managing mountain pine beetle. Also, Mr. Speaker, I’d say to you that along the eastern slopes and with the reclamation of the coal mines we have some of the largest bighorn sheep herds in North America. They’re flourishing, and we’re using them to export sheep to other parts of North America.

Dr. Brown: Finally, can the minister advise the House why we are continuing to capture and export bighorn sheep from the province when there is ostensibly a shortage?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would disagree with the member’s comments that there is a shortage of bighorn sheep in the province. I mean, I would suggest that there are some concerns about trophy rams, and we will address that, but our population is very stable. We have had very good success, again, from the sheep herds at the Cardinal River and Gregg River mines. We have shipped sheep to Wyoming, to Montana. We just had a capture here – I believe it was in January – where we shipped ewes and young rams to North Dakota. We will continue to make sure that our herds are sustainable and make sure that they continue to be healthy.

Health Care Spending

Mrs. Towle: Red Deer’s dialysis unit is now at capacity, and clients who require dialysis rely on it for their life. Dialysis is also a core service of Alberta Health Services. In Red Deer dialysis patients are travelling elsewhere two to three hours a day, three to four days a week to get life-saving treatment. Unfortunately, the Red Deer-South MLA and the Health minister don’t think dialysis in Alberta is as big of a deal as a premierial sky palace. How does this government continue to prioritize rooftops and swanky sky palaces over life-saving dialysis treatment?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to tell the House that both the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and his colleague the MLA for Red Deer-North do an excellent job of representing their own constituents in a fair and objective way and do not present their constituents’ concerns in the context of such ridiculous analogies as we’ve just heard.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the demand for dialysis is growing across the province. The incidence of renal failure and the incidence of renal cancer are increasing commensurate with the increase in other chronic diseases. Red Deer is one of the fastest growing areas of the province. We are looking at ways to expand . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Towle: It's unfortunate that the Member for Red Deer-South didn't speak up when you were talking about all of those extra expenses in the sky palace and explain the situation in Red Deer.

Given that this government decided in 2013 to spend \$600,000 on fancy New Age, mind-altering courses for Alberta Health Services executives, how does the Health minister honestly tell Albertans that the priorities of this government are executive coaching, million-dollar severances, and soft landings instead of life-saving dialysis treatments?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly the sort of illogical and incomprehensible rhetoric that does a disservice to the very serious issues that we're dealing with in delivering health care in Alberta. The opportunity cost decisions in health care are at a level they have never been at before in Canada. We are dealing with the need to expand primary health care, we're dealing with higher incidences of cancer, we need to keep up with new technology and new drugs, and we need most urgently to deal with the challenges posed by the growing incidence of chronic disease like renal disease. Those are the levels of discussions that we have on this side of the House.

Mrs. Towle: It's interesting that the minister could foresee that all his executives needed extra coaching but couldn't foresee that Red Deer residents might need some dialysis.

Given that in 2012 – in 2012, Minister – Alberta Health Services spent \$460,000 a day on these outside consultants, doesn't the Health minister know that he is fully responsible for the decisions made under his watch at Alberta Health Services that continue to prioritize executives before life-saving dialysis treatment for Albertans?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I know is that this government understands that the health care system is about people and their families and communities. It's not about cheap political rhetoric. It is not about demeaning, besmirching the reputations of people.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I know is that we've cleaned up executive compensation in Alberta Health Services, we have cleaned up the issue around travel and expenditure, and we have reduced the number of vice-presidents in that organization from 80 to 10. I don't know of a leaner \$13 billion organization in this country or in North America, and we're very proud of what's been achieved at Alberta Health Services.

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

Cancer Incidence and Treatment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 10 years cancer concerns have been identified in Fort Chip. In 2009 the Minister of Health along with the federal government committed to a multiyear longitudinal health study with over a million dollars. The cancer update last month by his department again confirmed the cluster of biliary tract cancers along with lung and cervical cancers in Fort Chip. Small wonder that their trust and the trust of our American neighbours in this government is being threatened. To the minister. The world is watching. Given the five years since the announcement of this health study what are the results? When will the residents of Fort Chip see any . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the residents of Fort Chipewyan know that this government takes their health and their health concerns extremely seriously. That is why since 2009 the chief medical officer of health of this province has overseen studies such as the Alberta cancer registry surveillance study, that reports each year on the incidence of cancer in that region and across the province. I would be the first to agree with the hon. member that the community needs to be involved in this discussion. That's exactly what we've been attempting to do for some time. In fact, the results of the study were released before we could arrange that meeting with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has totally ignored the question of the million-dollar commitment to a health study for which we've seen no results. When are we going to see the cancer cluster investigated – that's been on the books for at least five years and recognized – in a separate investigation?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the investigation that has been conducted is exactly what the hon. member is asking for. We have identified higher than expected rates of cancer in this community as compared to other parts of the province. We know exactly what types of cancer are involved. The chief medical officer of health has spoken very specifically to what the risk factors are for those types of cancer and how he is willing to work with the community to address those. Those are hard, focused efforts to improve the health and health outcomes of people in the community, and I know that the chief medical officer is anxious for the opportunity to talk with the community about that.

2:30

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2011 reported that Alberta has the lowest survival for lung cancer in the country. CIHI this year reported Alberta dead last in waiting times, three months for lung cancer surgery. That's three months of further growth and spread. Mr. Minister, what are you doing about this long wait-list for cancer?

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned by the last Canadian Institute for Health Information report specifically as it relates to lung cancer. I've discussed the issue with Alberta Health Services. I understand that there are a number of factors involved. Is their performance good enough? Absolutely not. I know that AHS has put a lot of effort into addressing the preoperative assessment process and speeding that up by doing things in tandem as opposed to in a linear fashion. The bottleneck seems to be the number of people that are ready to be treated and need access and need to get that access to surgery quicker.

LGBTQ Student Supports

(continued)

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, on Monday in this House we debated a very serious motion, Motion 503, which allows students to form gay-straight alliances in their schools. These clubs are proven to reduce bullying, encourage understanding, and build truly inclusive school communities. Unfortunately, the Wildrose opposition and 22 members of the PC Party, including the Minister of Education, voted against the motion. To the Minister of Education: will you do the right thing and introduce legislation allowing students to form GSAs in their schools?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the legislation exists and the policies exist already for students to start up GSAs. Like I said before, we support them. The motion on Monday was not about allowing students to start up GSAs. It was about imposing legislation broadly across the province removing the right of school boards and trustees to set those policies and make those decisions. This member would like us to throw trustees and school boards under the bus. They're duly elected officials. If this is truly an issue, we can deal with it if that can be proven.

Speaker's Ruling Items Previously Decided

The Speaker: Hon. members, let's be reminded that Motion 503, as far as I know, has been decided by the House and our rule under Standing Order 23 says, "a Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . . raises matters that have been decided during the current session." So figure out another way to get your question asked is all I'm saying. Okay? [interjections] I don't need any coaching, Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-Buffalo. Truly, I don't.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, let's hear your first sup.

LGBTQ Student Supports (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about future legislation.

Given that school boards should not be allowed to deprive students of the right to use a proven, effective tool to combat bullying in our schools and given that all minority rights need to be protected, will the minister recognize that the new Education Act does nothing to protect students' rights to form a GCA, and will he commit to taking action, and if not, why not?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, they're GSAs. I know that he just made a mistake, but they're GSAs. There are all kinds of really valuable and really productive groups, support groups, initiatives, antibullying initiatives, and programs that are out there. [interjections] School boards and trustees and principals and administrators in those local schools decide which groups, which clubs, which initiatives, which programs are going to work best in their school, with the issues that they have, [interjections] with the resources and the people that they have, and we think that that's the best place to leave this decision. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, I wonder if we could proceed with your final supplemental. Did you ask it already?

Mr. Bilous: No; I have one more. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I thought you were wanting to address the House.

The Speaker: There was so much distraction here. You had Edmonton-Strathcona jumping in there, you had Edmonton-Centre jumping in there, and it was just hard to hear. But go ahead with your final sup.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the last comment, Mr. Minister, your own antibullying minister knows that it's not good enough and voted in favour of this motion.

Given that this PC government made a show of raising the pride flag to support LGBTQ rights in Russia and given that back in Alberta the rights of LGBTQ kids don't even extend to forming a club in order to stop bullying, back to the same minister: why will

you raise the pride flag during the Olympics but won't raise the standard of protecting kids from bullying?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we take this very seriously, and we are raising the standards against bullying. There are all kinds of investments and resources to that end. I would point to the fact that we have a minister, who is doing a great job, of Family and Community Safety as more evidence of that. GSAs are fantastic. They do great work. But there are a lot of other groups that do great work, and every time we come across a group that does great work and that we think should be in all the schools, we don't legislate them into every school in the province. That was the question that was put to us on Monday, not whether we support GSAs. Of course we support GSAs. We just don't think the Legislature is the best place to make the decision on which . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Gas Prices

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently some Alberta consumers have been shocked with gas heating bills that have more than doubled. Demand increased this past winter, but what is troubling is the fact that the fuel price, natural gas, has doubled. Why are consumers getting gouged, and will this government investigate the market for price-gouging?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a good question, a question that many Albertans are asking as well. It really does relate to the markets. As well, when we look across the Alberta, Canadian, North American markets, the amount of cooling this year, with regard to that the gas prices are high up. It is a market-based system but one that we always keep a close eye on as well. It's important. We've seen this across North America, and we always work hard to make sure that we're paying close attention to this file.

Mr. Anglin: Okay. Let's pay close attention.

Given this winter's demand for natural gas only increased 10 per cent over last year and given this winter's demand for gas only increased 13 per cent over the five-year average and given we started the winter with record-breaking natural gas reserves, 8 per cent more than the five-year average, why did the retail price for natural gas increase 100 per cent, and how is this justified?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I did say in my opening comments, this has been the coldest winter that we've experienced in a long time. The prices of natural gas in January, February, and March were due to this unusually cold winter, not just here in Alberta but throughout North America. When you have that happen, you have a low inventory. [interjections] When there's a low inventory, prices go up.

Mr. Anglin: A record-breaking inventory isn't a low inventory.

Given consumer gas heating bills are averaged over a 12-month period and given the 12-month average price of the wholesale market is \$4.51 and given the five-year average price of wholesale natural gas is \$4, can this government explain to hard-working Albertans why the average retail price has doubled and the average wholesale price only increased 13 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of 2014 we saw the gas prices at \$7.383. In February they were at \$4.86. [interjections] The rates have actually already come down for April. Under Direct Energy in the north we see \$5.18. In the south we see \$4.26, and with AltaGas it's \$6.38 per gigajoule. We see that this month. We saw a cold January, February, and March, and that's exactly why you saw the prices increase. They're now coming down. [interjection]

The Speaker: I don't know if the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre have finished their conversation.

Assuming they have, let us move on to Lesser Slave Lake.

2:40

Gift Lake School

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A sudden closure of the Northland school division's Gift Lake school resulted in a shutdown due to extensive black mould, displacing 757 students. These students have been forced to get their education at various locations as well as in many communities miles away. On a daily basis I hear my constituents voice their concerns over the scheduled December 2014 completion date of the new Gift Lake school. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that we are getting a beautiful school in Gift Lake and that it is being built slowly, in my view, and taking into consideration the mould issue, can your department somehow expedite the building process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the member for advocating. As you know, the health and safety of Albertan students and Albertan kids is of the highest importance. The hon. member is right in saying that we are struggling with the schedule for this particular school. Getting rid of the mould has been a struggle. Also, we're pulling together Northern Lakes College and two other organizations in a partnership to try to make sure we do this the best way that we can. I would say to the member that the people in Alberta Infrastructure are working very hard to get it done, but we're not finished.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First sup.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure my constituents will be very happy.

To the Minister of Education: given that modulars were promised to Gift Lake to ensure displaced students have an appropriate learning space, why is it taking so doggone long to do that?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I would echo my colleague's comments that this MLA has been an incredible advocate for her community. But I can say that there has been a great deal of work done to make sure that the site at the Gift Lake community centre is both properly prepared and ready to accommodate these students, and we anticipate that they'll be ready for occupancy in May. In the meantime there's been excellent collaboration, I understand, between Whitefish Lake First Nation band council and the Northland school division to accommodate the Gift Lake students and staff at the Atikameg school. So Gift Lake students and staff are now fully accommodated at the Atikameg school,

and I'm assured that they have a good learning environment there until . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: To the same minister: given that we have often been accused of being slow in our efforts to enhance aboriginal education throughout Alberta, what are you doing to ensure First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are getting the opportunity they deserve, given the fact that they have circumstances like this?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a great point. One of the things we focus on is equitable access to opportunities for all our kids across the province. I know the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has worked very hard on this as well. One of the things that's happening is that the MOU between the First Nations in Alberta and the provincial government and the federal government has been progressing quite nicely, and a number of initiatives have come out of that. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was just hosted, the last conference here in Alberta, our Premier and our minister made comments there, commitments that all kindergarten to grade 12 students are going to learn curriculum about treaties and about residential schools. That is just the start of some of the many great . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we had five points of order in the space of about 10 or 12 minutes. Over the next few days I'll be approaching all four caucuses as well as independent members to chat about coming to your caucus for a brief chat with each of you should you wish. I hope you'll accept my invitation to come and speak with you, and I'll start that almost immediately. Thank you for watching out for that.

Statement by the Speaker

Order Paper Revisions

The Speaker: A small housekeeping item before we go on with other business. The Clerk will call other matters in a moment. I would like to point out a minor change that will be made to the Order Paper due to recent changes to Executive Council. Today's Order Paper shows the former Minister of Municipal Affairs by name as the sponsor of Bill 6. The Order Paper will be changed to simply indicate that the sponsor of this bill is the Minister of Municipal Affairs, period, which is how the bill has been printed. Hence, the sponsor of this bill will be the current member of Executive Council who has responsibility for this particular ministry.

In 30 seconds from now we will proceed further with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The issue at hand now is members' statements. I would just ask all of you to please be as respectful as possible when members are delivering private members' statements. They have the full right and honour to be heard and listened to carefully, and typically we do not entertain points of order during these private members' statements. Let's see how we can follow that and have it applied today.

Alberta Health Services Consulting Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, today we released even more documents highlighting the culture of bureaucratic waste at Alberta Health Services. Yesterday, of course, we revealed the big number, \$250 million on outside consultants in an 18-month period ending September 2013. Today let me give you an example.

We found out that a senior executive whose final day of employment with AHS was August 31, 2011, received a juicy consulting contract worth \$250,000 the very next day. The executive, Pam Whitnack, was an executive VP since the superboard was created. She served in her role until the end of May 2011, when her position was abolished through restructuring. She stayed on the payroll until the end of August 2011, at which point she started a private consulting company called Whitnack and Associates. She also collected over \$800,000 in executive pension, Mr. Speaker. According to our research Whitnack and Associates has received almost \$350,000 in consulting fees from AHS for, quote, executive coaching, unquote. Whether or not her \$250,000 contract is included in these payments or if it's on top of that amount, we don't quite know.

Mr. Speaker, here's the bottom line. An AHS executive VP was restructured out of her AHS executive position, handed an almost million-dollar pension package, and hired back the very next day on a sole-source consulting contract worth a quarter of a million dollars. This entire sordid example is precisely what is wrong with Alberta Health Services.

We've got lung cancer patients waiting twice as long for treatment as everyone else in Canada; we've got dialysis patients who can't get service in their cities and towns. There isn't enough money for these priorities, but there always seems to be enough money for well-connected health consultants. Albertans are tired of seeing their precious health care dollars flushed away. AHS is a disaster, and something must be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Education System

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are real problems in Alberta's education system, but they're being obscured by the confused debate over curriculum being staged by the PCs and the Wildrose. Chronic underfunding, huge class sizes, and lack of support for special-needs students are the real educational issues facing Alberta families. [interjections]

There are serious concerns about curriculum as well, but they have to do with the PC government's rushed overhaul and the undue influence of the oil industry over what kids will be taught. The Wildrose, armed with their drive-by educational experts, have been spreading misinformation about where these problems come from, suggesting that Alberta is no longer teaching basic math skills and terrifying parents about the direction of Alberta's curriculum. It's the height of irresponsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's New Democrats believe that schools need to teach both basic and applied skills. Children need the foundational math skills and also need to know how to apply them in the real world. We want to produce citizens who can think critically. That's something that the Wildrose, with their fundamentalist approach, would fail to do. [interjections]

In order to do any of this effectively, our schools need the supports and the funding that they've been denied by this PC government. Neither the PCs' sudden industry-led changes to the

curriculum nor the Wildrose's attempts to whip up anxiety about the curriculum for political gain will solve the problem in Alberta's schools.

A proper investment in learning and in teaching is the answer. We need to ensure that our children have the skills that they need to become fully functional citizens. That is the commitment of Alberta's NDP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, I specifically asked if you could please be polite and refrain from chatting, refrain from making noises, and all that kind of thing during private members' statements. Now, I'm sorry, but I have to cite Calgary-Buffalo. You spoke during almost the whole time. I know you didn't mean to; you got caught up with Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and someone else. But I would just ask you, please. Private members' statements are a very special time for private members, and we ought hear what they have to say, at least they ought be afforded the full opportunity, the dignity, if you will, to state their statements without any interruptions.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you did a good job getting your points out and hammering away anyway. Thank you.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

2:50

Edmonton Ski Club

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 50 years ago my brother Ross Dorward and I were at the opening week of Marmot Basin, Jasper, Alberta, an international skiing destination. Happy birthday, Marmot Basin.

Back in Edmonton here I had been skiing at the Edmonton Ski Club since I was six years old. In fact, I as well was a ski jumper, pretty much attending the club every weekend and several evenings during the week.

Today the club is in good hands, with Mr. Ken Saunders as president, his board, the staff, and the many, many volunteers that make it all possible. This not-for-profit club has been serving the people of Edmonton for the last 100 years. Consider this, Mr. Speaker: this club can be the hub of WinterCity recreational activities in the Saskatchewan river valley. As you know, the club is situated at the heart of the largest urban green space in North America, in the constituency that I represent, Edmonton-Gold Bar. Edmontonians from all over the city jog, bike, walk, and ski in the vast network of trails.

Mr. Speaker, this winter at the club many Edmontonians who have never skied, many from foreign lands, partook in Servus Free Friday, which provided them an opportunity to ski or snowboard. The stories are many, and the pictures are pretty special. Soon the LRT line will snake across the river from downtown to a station at the Muttart Conservatory then climb Connors hill en route to Mill Woods.

Thank you, city of Edmonton, for establishing the WinterCity strategy entitled For the Love of Winter. My colleagues in the Edmonton regional caucus will do all we can to support that strategy and support great places like the Edmonton Ski Club.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perched above the townsite of Banff on the side of buffalo mountain is one of Alberta's best kept secrets and iconic institutions, the Banff Centre. From its humble beginnings as the Banff school of fine arts in 1933, the Banff Centre has evolved into one of the world's largest incubators of new art and new ideas. The Banff Centre's mandate has been to make art and ideas accessible and to encourage us to think dynamically, dream big, tackle the tough questions, and, most importantly, to lead.

Last September the Banff Centre announced its intention to re-imagine its leadership programming as the Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute. In the Speech from the Throne our government committed to help fund the creation of the institute, working with the University of Alberta and the Banff Centre. The Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute is part of a collaboration between the Banff Centre and the University of Alberta called the Peter Lougheed leadership initiative.

The announcement to invest \$70 million over 10 years in the Peter Lougheed leadership initiative was made on March 6. New programming will be created for leaders, creators, and entrepreneurs in the public, arts and culture, social, and corporate sectors. Pilot programs in these areas will begin this summer. The institute will also support public school creative education, initially working with the schools in Banff and using technology to reach children and teachers across the province and nation.

It is our hope, Mr. Speaker, that the support demonstrated by the government will encourage the private sector and federal government to step forward and support this innovative initiative. The Peter Lougheed Leadership Institute will be officially launched at the Banff Centre later this year, positioning Banff, Alberta, and Canada at the forefront of global innovation for the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Sue Higgins

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour an individual who was and always will be loved by the citizens of Calgary. As we have heard, Calgary recently lost one of our most original political personalities with the passing of Sue Higgins. Known as a colourful, hard-working, straight-talking fiscal hawk, Sue Higgins served southeast Calgary on city council for 21 years.

There are countless stories of her cigarette smoking and her direct manner of speaking. Sue Higgins could be counted on to speak her mind clearly. Many will recall with affection when over 15 years ago there was a discussion to change the term "alderman" to "councillor." In true Sue Higgins fashion her reply was: I would rather be known as an alderbroad.

While serving on council, Sue Higgins would walk the talk to understand the challenges of our city. She was known to go through budgets with a fine-tooth comb, and when she had questions, you better have had the answers. There is even a story that she worked a shift on the back of a garbage truck.

Mr. Speaker, today we acknowledge the strong woman who, through her sacrifice and service to the city of Calgary, changed the face of what we know council to be today. Known as a champion of her communities, she was committed to the people through and through. Her love of hockey, especially the Flames,

was infectious, and she knew what mattered most to the people and acted accordingly.

Sue had a great sense of humour. For her retirement party she had banknotes made up with her picture on it, and the message underneath: more tender than you think. Indeed, she was more tender than you might think. She lived her life seeking to serve and help those in need. One of her final acts of kindness and service was to ask that instead of flowers, donations be made to the Calgary HandiBus Association.

We thank the family of Sue Higgins for their support and pass on our condolences. Sue Higgins knew to her core that living a life of service was the only life worth living, an example for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Battle of Vimy Ridge

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the profound honour of standing at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial on Vimy Ridge. I have looked up in awe at the white towers, standing oh so tall, cutting sharply into the French sky. I have run my fingers over the names of some of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France, including those lost in this historic three-day battle that alone claimed the lives of over 3,500 Canadians.

I have witnessed relatives finding the names of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers on the memorial and breaking down, personifying the grief portrayed in the statues that so beautifully adorn the monument, that will forever remind the world of Canada's achievement and of our sacrifice 96 years ago today.

I have seen with my own eyes the trenches, the ground still scarred from the shelling, the landmines, and the souls of those lost in this battle. I tried so hard to imagine how it must have felt in those trenches, looking up at the ridge from below, your friends falling to enemy fire all around you, and to find the resolve and perseverance to keep fighting.

As I overlooked the very ridge where it is said that Canada became a nation, I tried to imagine what those soldiers went through, how it could have felt to leave my family, my loved ones behind to fight for the notion of peace and fairness in a world far, far away. The fear, the adrenaline, the anger, the uncertainty, all on unfamiliar ground for most would have been too much, yet all of this was overcome by the Canadian soldiers fighting shoulder to shoulder for the first time, who prevailed against the odds to win this historic battle that was to become a turning point for the Allies in the First World War.

For all time, this day and the monument at Vimy Ridge will stand as a testament to everything this country stands for: courage, sacrifice, honour, justice, and peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've noted the time on the clock, and I caught the eye of the Deputy House Leader, presumably seeking unanimous consent. I'm not sure.

Mr. Denis: I would ask unanimous consent to waive rule 7(7).

The Speaker: You've heard the motion. Unanimous consent would be required so that we can go past three o'clock to finish a few items on Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Let us proceed, then, with Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, with your tabling.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table copies of the names of over 26,000 people who have signed a petition calling on this government to stop consulting with large companies like Syncrude, Cenovus, and Suncor on the redesign of our province's K to 12 curriculum. Kindergarten to grade 3 in particular is a very formative time in a child's education, and it's outrageous and appalling to have oil and gas companies involved in developing and writing curriculum for our kindergarten to grade 3 students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Centre or someone on behalf of.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've brought copies of a press release by Rocky View Teachers expressing their disappointment in three of their MLAs – the one from Airdrie, the one from Chestermere-Rocky View, and the one from Banff-Cochrane – for voting against Motion 503 and the establishment of GSAs in all schools where kids want them. They are sending three kids to Camp fYrefly as sort of their protest to those MLAs. I have a copy of that press release here, and I offer it to the page at this time.

The Speaker: Thank you. Was there another tabling on behalf of an hon. colleague?

Mr. Hehr: No.

The Speaker: Let's move on to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter dated February 4, 2014, that I had sent to the federal Justice minister and Attorney General, Peter MacKay, requesting additional funding for legal aid but also requesting a formula that does not discriminate against provinces like Alberta, which has had an explosive population increase. The letter also talks about how in the last 11 years there has been no federal funding increase to legal aid while our funding has continued to go up.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others? Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, you have tablings?

Mr. Bikman: Yes, please.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Bikman: I have a number of tablings and the requisite copies. The first is from Thaine Olsen, a constituent of mine in Magrath, commenting on the valuable STEP program, that was cancelled last year, and the impact that that's having on the community. I've also heard from others in the same vein.

Also, I have a letter from Brian Fozzard, president of Crowfoot Courier, talking about the 28th anniversary of his own little small business and asking us to "celebrate the strength of small business in our communities, by acknowledging the many women and men

who dedicate their lives to this most worthwhile institution." Of course, we know the role that small business plays in our communities.

I have a number of tablings from Perry Reese and Brant Reese, patrons of the Sage Creek Grazing Association, commenting on the alarming, powerful, nonelected lobby group with the power to overrule federal and provincial laws in our country. He points out that those who take advantage of grazing leases are good stewards of the land and do a tremendous job of caring for the land, perhaps better than just leaving it alone since there is nothing to graze on it, and he talks about the injustice that this represents and the serious impact that it will have on leaseholders like him as well as on little towns like Manyberries, Alberta, that rely on the oil activity in that area and that will now be shut down.

Finally, tablings from a number of residents in the town of Raymond concerned with the situation regarding the Raymond elementary school, particularly as it pertains to the kindergarten class. Among them I have Jenn Ehlert, Kathy Kawade, Lyndsi Coppieters, Mike and Amelia Quinton, and one that I didn't include was from Brittany Clark. I have the requisite number of copies there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are now at points of order. There were a number of points of order raised today. I've referred to them once, and we're now going to hear them.

We'll begin with point of order number 1, which was by the hon. Member for Airdrie. If you would care to proceed with point of order number 1, we'd be happy to hear it.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were three points of order. I can deal with two of them at once and the other one separately. I don't know if it's okay to proceed that way.

The Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Anderson: All right. The first point of order, Mr. Speaker, deals with Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly the two issues that arose. They were the same issue, just spoken by different members. The first was the reference by the Minister of Human Services, calling the folks over here the lake-of-fire party. The second was by the leader of the Liberal opposition, who, when questioning the Education minister, I believe, called members over there in the PC caucus homophobes.

I'm going to share with you something, Mr. Speaker. There are members of this caucus over here and others that have gay and lesbian family members, there are members of this caucus over here who have immediate family members and spouses who are visible minorities, there are also appreciated and cared-for employees at the highest levels of our party who are members of the LGBT community and others who are visible minorities, and all of us in this Assembly have dozens and even hundreds of close friends and acquaintances from both the LGBT community as well as visible minorities. So I think that some people can imagine the hurt and the pain that it causes certain members in this House and their family members and friends when they are referred to as bigots and homophobes.

To make it clear, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that our caucus over here – and I don't think there are many caucuses in here, if any, that would disagree with us on this point – passed a motion unanimously at the last Wildrose AGM of almost a thousand people that were there that said that the Wildrose will defend the

fundamental rights of freedoms of all persons, that this includes but is not limited to the right of freedom of belief, public expression, practice, and association, and that these rights and freedoms shall be protected regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, or sexual orientation of that person or classes of people.

We may in this House, Mr. Speaker, disagree on the best ways to protect these rights and these groups, and also we may disagree on the best ways of balancing competing rights, which can be very, very complicated, obviously, when you have the rights of one group that in some ways come up against the rights of others in our society from time to time. We sometimes disagree on that, on what laws to pass or what ideas will work in balancing those competing interests. But make no mistake; in my view, there are no homophobes in the PC Party that I've ever met, there are no racists in the Liberal Party that I've ever met, there are no religious bigots in the NDP that I'm aware of, and none of those terms could be applied to anybody in the Wildrose caucus either.

I had a debate this morning with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on CBC Radio on Motion 503. It was a very respectful debate. If anyone knows the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, of course, she argues her positions very well, very strongly, and with great passion. She did so this morning with complete integrity and was as forceful as any argument that I've heard on this issue, but she did so without degrading the other side of the argument. I think that that's an example of how we should debate these issues.

The reason I say that is because when we use comments that are meant to divide us in terms of people who hate and people who don't hate, when we use terms like "bigot" and "homophobe" to describe other people on another side of an issue, what happens is that, ironically, when we do that, we're promoting more intolerance. We promote hatred and division, especially outside of this Chamber, by people who watch this and get really upset and think that the person next to them should be looked on with suspicion and so forth.

3:10

I would just ask that as we go forward in this Assembly, all members of the House – my caucus, the government caucus, the Liberal and the ND caucuses – refrain from using words to describe each other like "bigots," "homophobes," "racists," those types of words that are so awful in what they mean if applied to another person that it really is just something that does not have a place in this House and that we debate these things strongly but that we do so respectfully.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Airdrie for his comments. With respect to the Minister of Education's reference to that party as homophobes, I would like to withdraw that on his behalf.

The Speaker: No, hon. member. You may have misheard. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the leader of the Liberal opposition, who made a comment to that effect, not the Minister of Education.

Mr. Denis: If I may, Mr. Speaker, on the second item that I wanted to just mention on behalf of the Minister of Human Services, I think this can be dealt with, with respect, by way of a point of clarification. This goes back to a member of their party

who had said, "You will suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell," and that was a reference to people in the LGBTQ community.

I recognize that no member of the caucus has said that. The Member for Airdrie didn't make that representation. But, similarly, I think that that's what the Minister of Human Services was referring to, and I think that that can be dealt with by way of a point of clarification.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else? Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for Airdrie for his impassioned speech. I take what he says at face value, and I applaud him for the sentiments that he shared with this honourable House.

At the same time, if I look at our 23(h), (i), and (j) – and I'll refer to them – it says:

- (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.

Those are the tests for a point of order to find a Member in this House in violation of the rules that we have set to govern ourselves in this House.

I guess that to put some context around the question asked by the hon. leader of the Alberta Liberals, he was asking his questions around Motion 503, which essentially read: be it resolved that gay-straight alliances be mandatory in all schools in this province where kids wish their existence, to have them. The reason for this motion and this question was that in Alberta we currently have a system of education that has private schools – some of them are private religious schools – public schools; public separate schools, which are Catholic schools; charter schools; and some francophone schools.

In that makeup of those schools there are different thoughts around sexual orientation and different values and mores ascribed by adults that in some instances may not allow for the children of those schools to start a gay-straight alliance. Those are facts. We can see that there are 40 gay-straight alliances in public schools in this province whereas, to my knowledge, there are zero – zero – in our Catholic system. There are zero at our private religious institutions. I think that is where the GSA . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, before we get a 459 on relevance and everything else, just restrict yourself to the point of order if you would, please. Otherwise, some would suggest you might be continuing the debate. So just zoom in on the point of order, please.

Mr. Hehr: I have to give context. I believe the hon. Member for Airdrie gave some context around his reasons for his comments, and I'd ask for the same leeway.

Okay. Hence, the question that was asked. If we look at the history of this province and the many people who have been here a long time, we have not been – largely the government party has not always openly embraced the movement of progress in this province towards tolerance and understanding. I think that's a fair comment, and the record understands that. It started when we were the last province to recognize sexual orientation in 2008. We then brought in Bill 44 shortly thereafter, which . . .

Mr. Oberle: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We don't normally do points of order during points of order. Is this about relevance?

Mr. Oberle: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: State your point briefly.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j) and the use of language that is likely to incite behaviour in this House, I would ask that you bring that member to order.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Airdrie just eloquently, as this hon. member pointed out, put some context around his response to the issue at debate right here, which is a point of order, to point out that the use of the term that we're talking about is absolutely unacceptable, and it was right for him to put some context around it. Now, if this hon. member wishes to put some context around why it is, in fact, acceptable to use that term, I'm going to object to that. I think it's incorrect. There is an absolutely ridiculous, unacceptable term on the floor. The member just needs to withdraw it. Withdraw it.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I suspected this might be going in that direction, which is why I cautioned you not two minutes ago, and I'm going to caution you again. We're not here to prolong the debate. Please. [interjection] Now, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, listen, please. I'm going to allow you a very brief moment to sum up your point. You've got one minute. Go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Essentially, if we look at our rules – and you're right. I was going through the long history of events here in Alberta, and maybe I got carried away with that as I'm prone to do regarding a topic that I'm very passionate about, the promotion of human rights in this province. I apologize to members if they were sensitive towards me going through the history of that. Now I apologize to the hon. member.

Nevertheless, there was nothing directed at a member. According to the rules in this House, with nothing directed to a member – if some people felt the hon. member was calling an individual member a homophobe, well, that wasn't the case – I would stand by the fact that this is not a point of order at all.

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, do you wish to chime in here?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. This Motion 503 . . .

The Speaker: We're not here to debate 503. We're on a point of order, and it happens to be exactly about comments that you made, so if you could just zoom in on that, please.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, on this motion, on this issue, I wish to withdraw the words "in your caucus," and I apologize to the members if I offended anybody here. I withdraw "in your caucus," and I apologize. As you know, we are very passionate about the things that we discuss in the Legislature, and the passion here is expressed for the children. The hon. Member for Airdrie: I saw how hurt he was. I was watching outside. That's why I came running back in to withdraw those words and apologize.

With the passion of this bill and this motion, imagine if children are being called these words and the effect on them. So I make no apologies for my passion, but I do apologize if I offended anybody here.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, two points of order have been raised at the same time. The second one deals with the comments made by the leader of the Liberal opposition, so I'm going to deal with that one first. I want to briefly just review what occurred here, and I apologize for the time. I know that estimates start at 3:30 and we're up against the time clock, but some things have to be said when making these rulings, so here we go.

At approximately 2:08 the leader of the Liberal opposition, among other things, said, according to the Blues, to the Premier: "Are you a placeholder Premier or a real Premier who puts children first by standing up to the homophobes in your caucus . . ."

Now, we've heard some debates and arguments on both sides of all of this. I'll talk a little bit more about it during the second ruling. We've also heard an apology and a withdrawal of certain words from the lips of the Liberal opposition leader.

But, hon. member, I wonder if you would like to reconsider and just retract that entire statement. That would make things a lot clearer and not leave any grey area, and I'm sure it would put the issue behind us. We all understand passion, we all understand heat of the moment, we all have made slips and mistakes, and others who have yet to make them I'm sure will at some point during their career here. So could I ask you to please just rethink and perhaps apologize for and retract that entire sentence?

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, if it will please the Assembly, I'll retract the sentence.

Thank you.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

The Speaker: Let us move on to the second issue. This dealt with a comment made by the Minister of Human Services. The preamble to what I'm about to say goes back to about 2:01 this afternoon when the Leader of the Official Opposition said, "Mr. Speaker, the Human Services minister has also mused about becoming Premier." Then she went on to talk about avoiding the appearance of campaigning on taxpayer dollars and asked him to resign his position from cabinet. I intervened and talked about that internal party matters ought not be raised here. Then the Minister of Human Services said: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has a very rather undignified appearance, if the member so wants to know, is that lake-of-fire party over there trying to zip one day, zag the other."

Now, that sort of falls into that category of intemperate language. I'm reminded of *Erskine May*, page 444, with respect to maintenance of order, House of Commons. Under the heading Allegations against Members it states the following. "Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. Parliamentary language is never more desirable than when a Member is canvassing the opinions and conduct of his opponents in debate."

Now, strictly speaking, the Minister of Human Services did not direct his comment to one single individual. However, I think by inference there was an implication made here, and I don't think it's an appropriate one, and I hope we won't hear it again. By the same token, I'm hoping we won't hear any intemperate accusations or false avowing of motives by members of the opposition against the government side because that knife slices both ways. You can't ask me for a ruling in favour of one when you're not prepared to accept a ruling against you perhaps another day. Please bear this in mind. I've spoken about it many times.

I'll save the House some time by simply asking the hon. Minister of Human Services or someone on his behalf if they wish to apologize and withdraw that particular reference.

Mr. Denis: I will withdraw that reference on the Minister of Human Service's behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you. That concludes that matter.

Now, we have two more points of order at least. The Minister of Justice.

Point of Order

Questions about Political Party Activity

Imputing Motives

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If it would please this Chamber, I think we can deal with both of these items omnibus.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you. The citation deals with 23(h), (i), (j), and (l), familiar to many in this House.

- (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.

And finally:

- (l) introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

Now, I basically have two statements. With respect to when I had risen – I don't have the benefit of the Blues that you do, Mr. Speaker – the Leader of the Official Opposition had indicated that there somehow were cuts in my department to an electronic monitoring program. There were no cuts. There were no such cuts. This particular program was a four-year pilot project that concluded on March 31, 2014. Subsequently, after I had spoken to the members for Red Deer-South and Red Deer-North and also some of the affected people, I had decided to continue this beyond that particular time. But to say that there were actual cuts is simply incorrect, and I would ask that the Leader of the Official Opposition please apologize and withdraw that particular comment. Again, I can table a document that proves there are no cuts. It was a \$450,000 program over that particular time, and then we decided to extend it past the expiry date. But to say that there were cuts in this particular area is simply false.

The second comment that I will make is on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader and the minister of environment with respect to the Leader of the Official Opposition's comments dealing with party matters. I will not beat a dead horse, Mr. Speaker, because you did rule on this yesterday, but I would say specifically that this again was a deliberate attempt to make allegations and impute motives upon many members of the government caucus. She suggested using government business to put forward bids for the PC leadership.

I quote again, from the citation *Beauchesne's* 409(7) on page 121.

- (7) 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.
- (8) A question that has previously been answered ought not to be asked again.

Your direction yesterday, that I won't quote, Mr. Speaker, is on page 384 of *Hansard*, but you clearly stated that there are to be no party items discussed in this particular House. So I would suggest that with respect to the Leader of the Official Opposition it is a

blatant attempt to sidestep rules in this Assembly. You ruled upon this yesterday.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure that you are aware, I want to point you also to *Beauchesne's* 193, which talks about a member that continually offends the practices of the Assembly, and *Beauchesne's* 193 you will find on page 55. It refers to: "In such cases Members who have breached the rules and who have refused to restore themselves to the grace of the House will not be recognized by the Speaker."

Of course, Mr. Speaker, dealing with our standing orders, Standing Order 24 deals with naming a member, and I'll leave that with you as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think this can be simply resolved if the Leader of the Official Opposition herself would rise in this House, would apologize, withdraw the remarks, and indicate that she will abide by your previous ruling. I do think that it would be incumbent to hear from her directly to explain the intent of her actions because no one can do that but her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the ankle bracelet funding issue I think, clearly, that's a point of clarification. The facts that we had before us, obviously, were why we were asking the question. We're, I know, very happy to see that the Minister of Justice is supporting that program going forward. Of course, our job as opposition is to sometimes light a fire once in awhile on that stuff. I think that's just a set of facts with maybe two different interpretations and so forth.

The second one was in regard to questions dealing with the race to be the next PC Party leader and, therefore, Premier. We did try. I know today the communications staff in our caucus and our party leader looked over your comments from yesterday, and we have tried to come up with a way that we can ask the question appropriately. We took out – for example, we added in "perceived" conflicts of interest as opposed to making accusations of conflicts of interest. We talked about perhaps resigning to avoid the "perception" of possible conflicts of interest. Hopefully, that was an appropriate change, but if that's not appropriate, then by all means please instruct us further on that.

Then with regard to – we didn't refer to the PC Party leader, of course, at this point. It referred specifically to the Premier's office, the head of Executive Council.

3:30

So we've tried to reword these things. Obviously, sometimes when you ask us to reword things, it can be difficult to make that balance. I know that if the Official Opposition leader said anything that went against your ruling last time, she would be happy to withdraw and, upon further instruction on the matter, pursue it using a different angle.

The key here is that there is a desire on our side, Mr. Speaker, if you can instruct us on how to deal with it, to just want to make sure that we can ask the government side about perceived conflicts of interest if they're going to run for PC leader. If that's completely out of the scope, well, then it's completely out of the scope. You let us know, and we will cease asking about it. But if you feel it is within the scope, then please instruct us as to the best way to pursue that line of questioning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations briefly.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are actually two issues at play here, and I think they're both rather important. The

first is whether a member of the bench or a member of this caucus intends to seek the leadership of the PC Party. You have admonished repeatedly and, I believe, correctly that that is not a matter for discussion on the floor of this House. That's party business. However – and I think the opposition is right in this – whether or not a member, any member of this front bench or caucus, is in a conflict-of-interest position is indeed a matter for discussion on the floor of this House.

However, one cannot accuse somebody of being in a conflict of interest short of being able to table evidence that indicates the same. You have admonished repeatedly in this House that one cannot attempt to achieve indirectly what one cannot achieve directly, and that is an absolute attempt – and the clearest it has been so far is today, when they actually linked it to the situation with the ankle bracelet, that the Minister of Justice faced. It fell just short of an outright accusation but clearly linked that decision and the subsequent moves made by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to a potential conflict of interest because he may or may not be contemplating something else. That is clearly attempting to achieve indirectly what one cannot achieve directly, Mr. Speaker.

So it's not a matter of clarification. It's a matter of, I think, correctly requesting that the member withdraw those remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Well, hon. members, on the first issue, and recognizing that estimates have already started, about cuts to a program or no cuts, I've skimmed through what I could of the Blues. I don't have all of the Blues, hon. members. Truly, in the end I think the Minister of Justice has got his clarification on the record saying one thing and the Member for Airdrie perhaps saying another in support of his leader. I see it more as a note of clarification, and I think we're going to just drop that issue there. Perhaps this will be pursued further tomorrow – I don't know – but let's end that one right there as a point of clarification.

With regard to the second point, which is to do with party matters being raised, this one gets into a little more of the cut and thrust of debate. I'm well aware of the ruling that I gave yesterday. I not only thought about it before I gave it, but I phrased it in such a way to be particularly pointed and, hopefully, in a way to be particularly constructive, if not helpful, to avoid the recurrence of it in the future. I did note today that the Leader of the Official Opposition basically went down a similar vein but eliminated the word "PC," which clearly makes it very, very political.

Now, it's a very difficult thing to sit in the chair and try and judge just spontaneously whether something is in order or out of order: did it cross the line or didn't it? In this case I allowed considerable leeway, but you saw where it went, and then I had to stand up nonetheless because suddenly three or four points of order were raised. When you are skating that close to the line, hon. members, especially, in this case, Wildrose members, you are really tempting your own fate.

Again, party matters, internal party matters, financing of campaigns, that type of political stuff just does not belong in this Assembly. If you want me to make that hard, fast rule and curtail the debate, then I'll have to consider doing that. It not only takes up valuable time – and that is not constructive to anybody – but it also leads to the avowing of motives against others, and you could construe some of those as personal attacks because there's innuendo involved here. There's innuendo involved. Just because someone is a minister and perhaps there are rumours by the media or by the press, unconfirmed ones, that he or she may be doing

something political in terms of their future doesn't necessarily make it so.

I would like to think and I would like to know that members who have taken that separate, special oath to be cabinet ministers would never put themselves at risk of doing something inappropriate. I just don't think that that's the case, and I'll bet you the same can be said of opposition members. In this case, raised by the Wildrose, I'm sure that nobody would appreciate questions or answers or statements being made about how you might be misusing your LAO budget. It could be said. It could be said in the same derogatory-type way, as an innuendo, and I would have to jump in and defend you in that case, and I would.

So in this case I'm going to ask you to remember just exactly what the Minister of Aboriginal Relations said because I have written it down here myself. You cannot do indirectly what is forbidden to do directly. Going around and skirting around it has to stop, and it has to end. So I'm going to ask for that for the last time, that you be very careful how you word your questions.

I'm fully in support of freedom of speech to the maximum. I'm pledged, honour bound, and oath bound to allow you to speak and speak and speak, and I do that. I do it to my own detriment sometimes, because I get nasty notes from both sides of the House sometimes. It's the most unpopular job in this Assembly – and you know it – because you can't possibly do a good job unless everybody is equally mad at you. You know, we joke about it at the Speakers' conferences. Then you know. That's why we meet is to console each other.

Let us leave that as a point well clarified and, hopefully, not to be visited again in the near future.

That having been said, I believe we're going to adjourn here so that estimates can carry on.

Was there another point? I'm sorry. There's one more point of order. My apologies.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Anderson: I'll keep this very short. It's section 23(h), (i), and (j) I'm referring to, specifically with regard to allegations against a member. There was a comment by the Minister of Infrastructure that said that I was on Treasury Board when the decision was discussed to approve the Federal building. It was in that context. That is not true. It was never discussed in my tenure on Treasury Board. The decision predated that time. I've been an outspoken critic of that office as well as many others in that PC caucus at the time. The minister continues to claim that that's the case, that that was discussed while I was on Treasury Board, that somehow I had any input into that decision. I would ask that he table an agenda of a meeting or meeting minutes or anything that would show proof of that. Otherwise, I would just ask that he refrain from making this claim in the future because it's just not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I'm not going to scare you with my memory here, but the Member for Airdrie was sworn into Treasury Board on September 15, 2009, the same day I was sworn in as parliamentary assistant for Energy, and he remained on there until January 4, 2010, when he decided to change caucuses, which is his right.

Mr. Speaker, I was not on Treasury Board at that particular time, but the member was just referring to the fact that he was on Treasury Board. I don't know what was discussed in that meeting. I don't know if you can actually table a Treasury Board document

before this Assembly. I suggest that you probably cannot. Moving forward, I would suggest that this is simply just a matter of clarification because the member was on Treasury Board during the dates that I had indicated.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We'll deal with this fairly quickly. Here's what was said in *Hansard*, according to the Blues. The Minister of Infrastructure rose after the Leader of the Official Opposition asked him a question about "the integrity to do the right thing and say no to this very bad idea," that being with reference to the alleged penthouse that may or may not have been on the books for consideration. The Minister of Infrastructure stood and said:

Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the member is talking about documents that are made public, and the fact is that change orders don't typically go to cabinet. In fact, you know, if you want to talk about accountability, perhaps the leader could ask the person sitting on her immediate right – I tabled the documents in this House yesterday showing that he was on Treasury Board at least one and possibly two years when this item was discussed – and ask him. The fact is that he would know that not all change orders of projects actually go to Treasury Board. This didn't happen . . .

And it goes on.

3:40

Now, I have no way of knowing what happened at a particular Treasury Board meeting. Public record would indicate who the members certainly were, but nowhere would we know what the

discussion might have been. A tabling says that a certain member was on there, so I'll take that member at his word, but by the same token, who knows if anybody who was in Treasury Board or some other committee meeting happened to be at a particular meeting where a particular item was discussed? We have no way of knowing that.

I think we have to accept two different versions of this statement right now and call this matter to a close. Just be careful, again, about allegations that we make and in particular if they're tied to accusations. Be very careful.

I'll close just by reminding everyone that there are numerous citations that you can look at, and the one that I'll just bring to your attention quickly is in *Erskine May* on page 445, where it talks about "the imputation of false or unavowed motives" that "prompt interference." There are other examples there as well. So please let's not have that be repeated again. That concludes that point of order.

Now, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) we stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow, noting that the two committee meetings are already under way for Families and Communities. Estimates for Human Services are going on in committee room A and will be going on for some time, and in committee room B it's Alberta's Economic Future, who are considering the estimates for Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Tonight at 7 Resource Stewardship will be considering the estimates of Energy in committee room A.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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