



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Second Session

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Issue 18

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Dear Lord, guide us to a place of worship when lives are lost, especially when they are lost through tragedy, and hear us in our prayers for those whose youthful lives were taken in Calgary. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has an introduction of a visitor, which will be done by the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young man who captured our imaginations a couple of months ago because of his exploits at the Sochi Winter Olympic Games not so much because of what he did but because of what he didn't do, and that is that he didn't skate in the 1,000 metres in speed skating. He gave his spot over to Denny Morrison, and because of that sportsmanship gesture Denny Morrison was able to compete and win the silver medal. I'm talking, of course, about Calgary's own Gilmore Junio.

Mr. Speaker, Gilmore is visiting us today. He had an opportunity to meet the Premier, and we had a discussion about a number of things. I'm very proud to be able to say that Gilmore has come up through the Alberta sport development system. In fact, I was coaching at the very first speed skating meet, 11 years ago, that Gilmore competed in. I wasn't coaching Gilmore. I was coaching my son, and I was hoping against Gilmore. I must say, though, that even at that point I recognized that he was skinny and awkward, but he got better. I will tell you now that he is one of the top speed skaters not just in Alberta and Canada but in the world. This year he skated the fifth-fastest 500-metre time ever skated by a men's speed skater. He has won gold, silver, and bronze medals this year representing Canada in World Cup events. His time of 34:25 is a mere 22 one-hundredths of a second over the long-standing world record held by another Albertan and another Canadian, Jeremy Wotherspoon.

Gilmore, as I said, came up through the Alberta sports system. He was the 2010 recipient of the athlete of the year, and I'm so pleased that he's able to join us today. Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, please welcome Gilmore Junio.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll begin with school groups, and then we'll go on with other special visitors.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 23 wonderful students and visitors from Belmead school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Neelam Boora, and Miss Frances Leard. When I asked them how I should describe them,

they used the words "creative, unique, extraordinary, inspiring, well informed, and amazingly difficult." In fact, they even used the word "fabulous" right here in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. There's a future MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark in that group.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome a wonderful group of students from Holy Spirit Catholic school in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Devon. There are 45 bright grade 6 students that are here with us along with their teachers, Ms Laura Joyce and Mrs. Mandy Jensen, and also parent helpers. I'm so thrilled to have them here. I know there are several of them that will be great leaders in our province. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 29 students from Our Lady of Victories school. They're here with their teacher, Tannis Williams, and parents Shelley Smith, Lana Tensen, and Donna Van Horn. I can tell you that I had an opportunity to speak with these students, and they had some tough questions. They're looking forward to question period today.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

Seeing none, we're going to proceed with the introduction of other guests. Let us go on with a number of guests who are here for the special Vaisakhi celebration. Please let's make these as quick as we can, starting with the hon. Minister of Human Services, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of introductions, the first of which is that we've effectively got three generations of the Bhullar family here in the Alberta Legislature today. I'm very pleased and very proud to introduce my grandfather Jogir Singh Bhullar; my grandmother Mohinder Kaur Bhullar; my father, Baljinder Singh Bhullar; and my mom, Sukhvir Kaur Bhullar. I would ask them to rise. When my grandparents are around, I suddenly lose words. I guess I will have to behave today. My grandmother actually watches me in question period quite often. Some days I'm glad she doesn't have the best command of the English language, but she can tell when I'm in trouble.

I'm going to move on, Mr. Speaker, to other members of the community from Calgary that have joined us here for the Vaisakhi celebrations: my aunt Hardish Kaur Sekhon; my uncle Darshan Singh Bhullar and his daughter, who is here all the way from India; as well, Mr. Mohinder Singh; Mr. Gurdial Singh Khehra; Mrs. Kaur; Sewa Singh Premi; Mohan Singh Sidhu; Mr. Jangbahadur Singh Sidhu; Gurdarsha Sidhu; Jaswinder Sidhu – they're not all related – Inderjit Rana; Naib Singh Sandhu; and Atkar Singh Sanghara. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you. I have three introductions to do today if you'll allow me. My colleagues from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-Mill Woods will be introducing the rest of the guests. It's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly as my first introduction my wife, Kamal Sandhu. She's been my life partner for the last 30 years. She has been a pillar through good times and bad times. She is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would ask my lovely wife to rise.

1:40

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly is our special guests Mr. Sony Ahluwalia, Crown prosecutor; his lovely daughter – she's sitting in the members' gallery – and his mother, Auntie Ahluwalia.

From the Gurdwara Nanaksar executive committee we've got Mr. Zora Grewal, Mr. Jagdev Dhillon, and Mr. Lotay; from Siri Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, executive committee are members Mr. Randawa and Jagdish Rai; and from the Sikh Federation of Edmonton are executive members Kulmit Sangha, Sunny Sangha, and Karnail Deol, past president. I would ask all of these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My last introduction to you and through you to the Assembly is Mr. Raj Tiwari, international Punjabi singer, with his group from India. He came all the way from India to take part in this Vaisakhi celebration along with Yash Sharma, editor of the *Asian Tribune*, and a constituent of mine, Paul Boparai. I would ask my guests in all of the galleries to please rise and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Associate Minister – Services for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also have three introductions to you and through you. It's my honour and distinct pleasure to introduce Mr. Mehar Singh Gill, president of Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha; Avtar Birk, who's also my constituent and general secretary for the same Gurdwara; as well as Darshan Gill from Siri Guru Singh Sabha, former president. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is my constituent and friend for many, many years, Mr. Tariq Chaudhry, president of Pakistan-Canada Association. Joining him today, also very good friends, are Iqbal Khan and Akmal Randalla. Please, gentlemen, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Speaker, for my final introduction I have Harbir Sandhu, Ranjit Powar, and Naib Sidhu. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a few members of the Sikh community who are very good friends of mine, Edmonton-Manning's, Edmonton-Ellerslie's, and, of course, yours. I will call their names and request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House: Mr. Verinder Grewar; Bota Gill; Joga Punimia; Sunny Briach; Manmohan Dhaliwal; Mager Ubihi; Gurmel Singh; Harjinder Gill; Lakhvinder Atwal; Hajinder Dhesi; Latt Bhinder; Parmjit Maget; Gurshan Buttar; Ashak Gagsane; and our guest from Calgary, Joginderpal Singh. Please rise for the traditional warm welcome of this House.

I also want to thank the people who prepared the food that we have all enjoyed today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, I have you down for another introduction. They are not here yet? Okay.

Let us move on.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you have two minutes each for your member's statements. Let's begin with Edmonton-Manning, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Vaisakhi Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today to speak about the Vaisakhi Day celebration that took place today under your watch in the Legislature. Vaisakhi marks the birth of the Sikh religion on the 14th of April, 1699, a traditional harvest festival season for Punjabis, and, according to the Bikrami calendar, the Sikh new year. The harvest season begins with the Vaisakhi celebration, and our farmers are happy to greet the crops. Sikhs reflect on the values and morals taught to them by their gurus and celebrate the birth of the Khalsa.

The Sikh community very much enjoys the values, freedom of speech, equality of life, and justice in Canada. These are the basic fundamental truths of the gurus' teachings. Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to see that Vaisakhi is celebrated in many parts of the world, especially here in Canada. Yesterday many ceremonies took place in Sikh temples. The Sikh community also believes in donating money and food to those who need it most such as the food bank.

Mr. Speaker, today members from my constituency, Edmonton-Manning, and members of the Sikh communities in Alberta came to celebrate with us here at the Legislature. Thank you to everyone who attended today and participated in this celebration. Members of the Sikh community are proud to say that they are proud Canadians. On behalf of the Sikh community we say thank you to Canada, who gave us a lot. Over the last 100-year history Canadian Sikhs have served and are still serving in fields such as the Canadian army, the RCMP, and within the Edmonton police force. Many have worked hard to become successful businessmen as well as successful politicians.

I sincerely invite our fellow Canadians to share in our Vaisakhi celebrations and parade coming up on the 18th of May in Mill Woods. Mr. Speaker, you have been part of that celebration for the last 10 years.

We are blessed to live in such a wonderful, multicultural Canada. I would like to wish everyone a happy Vaisakhi. God bless everyone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, the Education minister and his educators are rewriting the Alberta curriculum and changing the way mathematics and other subjects are taught. This push to inquiry-based, or discovery, learning is also fundamentally flawed, and it's not new. It has failed virtually everywhere it's been introduced, especially in the United States, and there is ample evidence that it is failing here. Our PISA scores have plummeted, we have fallen substantially in international and national rankings, and, perhaps most troubling, the number of

math-illiterate kids in this province has doubled since the introduction of this math in 2008. Study after study reveals what should be obvious: students who don't know their basics struggle as they move to higher levels.

I'm a parent. Most of us in this Legislature are parents. I know and you know that we should not be clouding our children's minds with multiple strategies to figure out five times six. The answer is 30. They should memorize it. It is a basic skill that will serve them well. The minister says that we need to teach our kids problem-solving skills as if this is a revelation. Does he not understand that having a high proficiency in fundamental math skills is proven to improve a student's problem-solving skills in critical thinking? You can't run before you walk.

New math textbooks like *Math Makes Sense* and *Math Focus* are the flawed recommended resources that Alberta Education is forcing on our students. Parents and many teachers are fed up with these new fuzzy math textbooks and unproven techniques. Alberta Ed should be giving our teachers the resources they need to help our kids. There is not one piece of empirical evidence that supports this inquiry-based, discovery-based model, yet all of the evidence shows that if you want to have math that teaches complex problem solving and critical thinking, you have to teach the basics.

I call on everybody to support us in calling on the minister to do this.

Family and Community Support Services

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about the good work done by a group of outstanding Alberta organizations. Family and community support services operate in cities, towns, and municipalities across Alberta. They bring together partnerships between the provincial government, the local municipalities, and numerous charitable organizations serving their communities.

Local FCSS programs share a common goal with the Ministry of Human Services, that of creating better outcomes for all Albertans and their communities. FCSS program staff and volunteers in every corner of the province have been acknowledged by ministers and MLAs for their tremendous support in advancing the social policy framework and poverty reduction strategy by organizing and facilitating community conversations for comprehensive input into those plans.

Over 318 municipalities and Métis settlements participate in the provincial FCSS program, ensuring that Albertans have access to a strong network of prevention supports and social services. Over half of those municipalities now contribute far more than the required 20 per cent of FCSS funding because provincial investment in FCSS has not increased since 2009. They do so because monies invested in FCSS-funded programs provide a strong return in savings by reducing the social needs of those served, including involvement with health care, social supports, policing, and justice systems. In many rural communities the municipal FCSS program is the first and last contact for residents. Alberta FCSS programs face daily challenges to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing population and demand for services.

The FCSS program budget, as I said, has not increased in the past five years and does not account for population growth or annual inflation. The result is that FCSS is declining in its ability to maintain prevention supports for Albertans, and in many cases municipalities are now faced with reducing or eliminating prevention supports and funding to community agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, a reminder that you have 35 seconds for your questions and 35 seconds maximum for your supplementals.

Let's begin with the loyal opposition leader.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me also start with a few words on the horrific murders in Calgary. Our thoughts and deepest condolences go out to the families and friends of the victims of this incomprehensible act.

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, a week ago we revealed that AHS spent \$250 million on outside consultants for things like image and reputation reports, executive coaching, and art consultants. The waste doesn't end there. Today we released more documents showing that AHS has spent nearly \$1 billion on untendered sole-source contracts over two years. To the Health minister: why is Alberta Health Services spending so much money without even attempting to get the best deal for taxpayers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that again would be a wrong assumption. She has no idea whether they attempted to get the best deal or not. In fact, there are rules around sole-sourcing contracts, and in fact Alberta Health Services' contract policy indicates the criteria for deciding if a sole-sourcing arrangement is appropriate. The policy also requires that Alberta Health Services contact the managers' unit to review and approve appropriate contracts before the contracts are finalized. The Auditor General has selected and assessed a sample of sole-source contracts for compliance with the policy and found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing contract. The premise the hon. member puts forward is absolutely wrong.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, let me give the hon. Premier some more statistics. Of the almost 1,300 sole-source contracts we uncovered, 503 of them were above the maximum limit set by AHS in its sole-source policy. Together these contracts that violate the policy account for 98 per cent of the total billion-dollar bill. That means AHS violated its own policy 503 times by literally handing out contracts to hand-picked firms and individuals without a competitive bid. To the Health minister: how on earth is this acceptable?

Mr. Hancock: It's absolutely amazing that we have an officer of this Legislature, the Auditor General, who does a sampling survey of the contracts and finds nothing out of order, yet this hon. member can make an allegation like that in the House. The reality is that Alberta Health Services, like many health services, sometimes buys equipment from suppliers that are the only ones that supply the equipment. That would be a unique circumstance which would require a sole-source contract. I'm not going to speak to the individual specifications of each of these contracts, but I can say that I trust the Auditor General has audited the policies, has found that the policies are being adhered to, and the appropriate operation is being undertaken.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's answers are unacceptable. He routinely brushes aside these gross abuses of tax dollars as though they were nothing. We saw it last week with the outrageous consulting fees; we're seeing it again today. Clearly,

he sees absolutely no problem with this kind of waste. To the Premier: if the Health minister won't get to the bottom of how and why AHS wastes so much taxpayer money, will he find a Health minister that will?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this House that this Health minister, this Premier, and this government are very interested in Alberta Health Services and any other agency of government doing appropriate work with respect to the issuing of contracts, making sure that they're fair market value, making sure that we always get the best deal. What is not helpful for Albertans is for this hon. member to drag out one contract and somehow make the assumption that somebody has done something wrong. The Auditor General has the job of making sure that we review our expenses against our policies, has done that, and has found nothing wrong in this case.

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

Ms Smith: Actually, the Health minister's job is to make sure AHS is following its policy each and every time.

Last week in this Legislature the Premier said this:

Virtually all of the contracts in this government go through an RFP process, with appropriate competition, but there are some times, in unique circumstances or when you need a unique talent, when you can sole source a contract.

In light of the information we've revealed today, is he still willing to stand by those words?

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In fact, my understanding of the information that the hon. member is relying on today is that there are a number of those contracts which are buying specialized equipment and that have to be sole sourced because there's only one supplier. There may be other perfectly viable and valuable explanations for that, but this hon. member doesn't care. She wants to besmirch the reputation of everybody who works in the system instead of relying on the processes that we have. Auditors General make sure that the public's money is spent appropriately and that policies are adhered to.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's words have proven completely and utterly false. Alberta Health Services has sole sourced everything from food and beverage services to snow removal to paper shredding. They've sole sourced marriage counselling, public opinion polling, and, yes, even more executive coaching. They've even sole sourced a research firm to review their sole-sourcing policy. To the Premier: please tell me how these unique circumstances are requiring a unique talent.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't tell her that, nor am I going to go back and look at two or three years of past sole-sourced contracts. The ones that she's talked about are a minimal portion of the ones put out, I'm given to understand. There are policies in place. People are expected to adhere to those policies. I understand that they have been reviewed and audited and that they have adhered to those policies. That's the appropriate way to deal with these things rather than going back and second-guessing people after the fact, picking out a supplier and saying: why four years ago did you do it this way? That's not the appropriate way to do it.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is 2012 and 2013, under the mandate of this government and that Health minister.

This government simply cannot go on defending the rotten contracting and spending practices at Alberta Health Services. It is bureaucratic waste at its worst, and taxpayers and patients are

paying the price. AHS was foisted on Albertans with a promise to reduce bureaucracy and get more money to the front line. The exact opposite has occurred. We know that this Health minister doesn't care, but let's hear from the Premier. Will he finally admit that AHS is a disaster and lead the way . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this Premier, this Health minister, and this government care very deeply about how Albertans are served and about how Albertans' money is spent effectively and efficiently. We've gone through a results-based budgeting process to look in all corners, to make sure we're achieving outcomes using Albertans' resources effectively and efficiently. We care about how Alberta Health Services does it, but we don't do that by going on a witch hunt and pulling out papers and waving them in the air. [interjections] We audit them against policies, we have the Auditor General audit them against policies, and if there are incidences of waste or problems with respect to contracts, we expect that to come to light in that process, and we deal with it in an appropriate way. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's just a struggle sometimes to hear overtop of the chattering that goes on across the bow, so please just keep it down, okay? That's all I'm asking. I'd like to not have to remind you again.

Let's go with the third main set of questions, please.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect this government and this Health minister to do his job.

Government Airplane Usage

Ms Smith: Yesterday we asked for details on one of the 50 flights the former Premier took with a family member. During last year's June flood the Premier flew to Jasper for the weekend. The government has so far failed to provide any details about the trip, which was paid for entirely by taxpayers. Albertans deserve to know if their taxpayer dollars were used appropriately or if they paid for a long-weekend vacation in Jasper. Will the Premier tell us which government officials the former Premier met with that weekend and what government business was accomplished?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the former Premier herself asked the Auditor General to review the spending policies, review the flight policies, and review those expenses. This Premier and this Premier's office will co-operate with that. We'll make sure that the Auditor General has access to any of that. What we would like and, I think, what Albertans would like to know is that there are appropriate processes in place to determine whether issues are appropriate or not, whether policies have been followed or not, and whether Alberta taxpayers' money is being used wisely or not. They would also prefer that this House focus on the policy and interests of Albertans rather than a witch hunt from the opposition.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, why is this so hard? What government business was conducted at the Jasper Park Lodge during the height of the floods last June?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea, and I am not about to go back and check everybody's calendar to find out what they were doing on any given day. I'm not going to ask ministers to give me their calendars so I can check to see whether they had an appropriate meeting with somebody before they booked a flight. We have ministers of the Crown and Premiers who are charged

with doing the public's business. They do it well. They do it 24/7. They book flights when it is appropriate to do so. If any question is called into that, the appropriate way to investigate that question is to have the Auditor General do it. The Auditor General is doing it and will have access to all the information he needs to do that job.

2:00

The Speaker: Let's try again.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it boggles the mind that they can't even answer a simple question.

As we stated yesterday, this government can't be trusted to competently and appropriately make use of its air fleet. The government of British Columbia, which also has the need to travel to remote communities, uses commercial flights for the vast majority of their travel. They've sold off their aircraft and saved taxpayers the cost of maintaining the fleet. They also usually fly economy, which this government might want to try from time to time. Will the Premier commit to putting taxpayers first and sell the government fleet?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have already answered this question several times. The Auditor General is going to look at the efficiency and the taxpayer value for flights. I did take the liberty of checking to see what the charter flight would cost to go to High River. We did fly there a number of times last year because of the flood. A charter flight to High River is roughly \$4,000 from Edmonton. The flight cost for ATS was about \$1,400. Let's take Lloydminster. Lloydminster is a little farther away. Flight costs for the government plane to go to Lloydminster . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order, please.

Thank you. Have a seat.

Let's just settle down here a little bit. I hear some outbursts coming from the government side now, I hear several coming from this side, and they're just not necessary, are they? They just aren't. They tend to create disorder, and they tend to create interventions by the Speaker. I'd like to avoid that.

Let's try to carry on. Let's go with the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, please, for your questions.

Government Spending

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The problems in health care aren't due to a lack of funding. Overall health spending is up from \$12 billion in 2007 to \$18.3 billion today, a 53 per cent increase compared to a 15 per cent increase in population. Since its inception AHS spending is up 73 per cent, from \$6 billion to \$10.5 billion, and still wait times are far too long today, a stunning example of AHS waste and why I've been calling for an audit. Premier, will you agree to conduct and make public a full forensic financial audit of AHS?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is an officer of this Legislature and has the duty and obligation to do an audit of public agencies, including AHS. He does that. There's the Public Accounts process if people want to question the annual reports or even question the Auditor. There are processes in place every year for audits to happen, and we expect that the business of government will go on, the business of Alberta Health Services will go on. The hon. member referenced the increase in services. We're very proud of the fact that Albertans get some of the best health care in the world right here in Alberta. People come from

all over western Canada for heart surgery, for liver transplants, for many other services that are provided right here in this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, a full forensic audit of AHS is what we're asking for. Yeah, you do get world-class care once you get in.

Let's try to get to the bottom of this waste and mismanagement another way. After Alberta Liberals exposed a suspicious sole-source contract granted to Navigator, a who's who of Tory land, I wrote the Auditor General asking for a review of these contacts. Following today's revelations the need for an investigation into all sole-source contracting is a no-brainer. To the Premier: will you join me by asking the Auditor General to investigate your government's overall policy of awarding sole-source contracts?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's not necessary to ask the Auditor General to do his job. He does it on an ongoing basis. In fact, with Alberta Health Services he's audited it twice now with respect to sole-source contracts and followed up with the recommendation that he made. He's made comments within his report, and he's indicated that he assessed a sample of sole-source contracts for compliance with the policy and found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-source criteria. These hon. members would want to use up all the resources of the public in looking at how all the resources of the public were used up. We want to use them in the best interests of the public, providing the services that they need.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals aren't calling for an audit of a little sample; we're asking for an audit of these billions that could be better spent.

As we saw with the untendered contracts for Navigator and again today, the current rules allow for sole-source contracting under \$75,000. That makes it way too easy for this government to avoid accountability by splitting them up into small contracts. Alberta Liberals have proposed a motion this session that will put a stop to this practice once and for all. To the Premier: will you commit to open, public tendering of contracts and put an end to sole-source contracting once and for all?

Mr. Hancock: First the hon. member suggests that he's got a motion in the House that he wants the House to debate and make decision on and make a recommendation, then he wants to preempt his own motion by asking me to do it ahead of time without any debate. I don't understand the nature of this person's understanding of democracy.

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

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The public-sector unions have been saying it, the pension boards have been saying it, and now the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has said it: Alberta's public-sector pensions are sustainable as is with no changes. They're good. Really. Why has the Minister of Finance told Albertans just the opposite?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it isn't just the Minister of Finance that has suggested that we have to address this problem now. The unfunded liability that is currently on the books has been addressed through the contribution rates the members are making. We've said that all along. This is not a great revelation

for either the hon. member or for the unions. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview asked the Auditor General in Public Accounts the other day whether or not this was a premature decision. The Auditor General said, "No. To consider these plans at this time is imperative because the contribution rates have reached, in the view of many people, an unaffordable level." It is our duty to do this to save the pension . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance has misrepresented what the Auditor General had said. It is clear that these plans are sustainable, which leaves many Albertans wondering: why is this Minister of Finance determined to weaken them? Why does the Finance minister want to force public employees to work longer and retire with less?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the pension promise that we have for our employees in the defined benefit plan, which 85 per cent of Albertans do not enjoy, is that when they retire, they will receive a percentage – five years, usually the five best years in their employment – for the rest of their life regardless of how much they have put into that pension plan. In July 2012 we went to all of the boards, and we said: we need to make sure that that pension promise is sustainable into the future for those members. That's exactly what we've done. These things have been in consultation for the last almost two years. We will actually do what . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The only people that this minister has consulted with on this are the pension boards, and they've told them that the plans are fine.

Every time that this government refuses to negotiate and imposes its will through legislation, it provides more evidence that it is arrogant and out of touch. Here we go again. To the Finance minister: why do you insist on dictating instead of negotiating?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm actually quite pleased that the hon. member has brought the concept of negotiation into the House, because that's exactly what we will be doing about joint sponsorship of the plans, about the contribution rate caps that are going to help sustain these plans. What is arrogant and perhaps even misleading to Albertans and the pension plan holders is the fact that this is going to lessen their pension. The pension promise at age 65 is exactly what we are trying to save for all of those members of the plan.

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

Alberta Health Services Sole-source Contracts (continued)

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. The taxpayers' waste at Alberta Health Services knows no bounds. As has already been pointed out, AHS spent nearly \$1 billion on sole-sourced, untendered contracts over a two-year period. The one that particularly caught my eye was a \$110,000 contract to review exclusive AHS procurement contracts. Yes, Mr. Speaker, unbelievably, they sole-sourced a contract to review their sole-source policy. To the Premier. I'm curious. Just what was the outcome of this review, and when will they be making changes to the policy?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, allow me to speculate because that is what I'll be doing. As I said to the House earlier, the Auditor General actually reviewed Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing policy and said that they needed to review their policy and update it. I would suspect they probably hired a contractor from outside to review their policy so that it could be updated. I suspect it was actually successful because in the subsequent review of sole-sourcing by Alberta Health Services, the Auditor General said: we found that the contracts complied with Alberta Health Services' sole-sourcing criteria.

2:10

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Premier has to learn what's happening, truly.

Given that AHS violated its own sole-source contract policy 503 times in only two years, how can anyone be confident that the Audit and Finance Committee, who the Health minister claims is responsible, is actually doing their job? Will you table the report on sole-sourcing contracts from the Audit and Finance Committee?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to take that under advisement for the Minister of Health to determine. I mean, Alberta Health Services is an agency of the government. I'm not sure where that report is or what it is. You wouldn't expect me to know that off the cuff today. But we'll take that under advisement and see if there's a report there and, if so, if it can be appropriately tabled. One thing this government is convinced of is that the public needs to know the policies, the programs, and how their funds are spent. That's why we have appropriate processes so that instead of taking these things out of context they can be done in a thorough and reviewable manner.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about policies and processes. Given that last week the Health minister brushed aside our questions about AHS misspending, saying, "I challenge her to present those questions to the Public Accounts Committee," I'd like to ask a question of the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Will you immediately call AHS before the committee so we can get to the bottom of waste and mismanagement?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, that is a fantastic question. The Public Accounts Committee, of course, is tasked with looking at previous years' spending by government and their agencies to see if the money was spent properly. So I would be happy – happy – to bring this motion forward to the Public Accounts Committee. Although the government, of course, has the majority of members on that committee, they are responsible members. I know they want to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible. I'm confident that that motion will pass, and we can get to the bottom of these expenses.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will clarify later about questions to chairs of committees.

Let's move on. Edmonton-South West, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Daycare

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure it's very well known by now that my constituency of Edmonton-South West is home to many new families composed of young working parents and their children. Young parents are frequently put in the

difficult position of having to either sacrifice a second household income or seek out child care. One daycare, Global Aware Care, in my constituency is on the verge of shutting down services because of a lack of transportation. In these new communities especially it's very important to look into ways to encourage operation of daycares. My question is to the Minister of Human Services. What sorts of government supports are provided for on-site daycares so that we as parents can entrust our children . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely agree with the member that it makes a lot of sense to have daycares located in places that are most convenient for parents and where parents are actually close by. Ultimately, the decision has to be made by private organizations or nonprofits, but what we do is provide for wage top-ups and some training and retention promotion funds that are available for staff once they become accredited to ensure that we have high-quality daycare programs in the province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: given that transportation options to and from southwest schools to daycare facilities are increasingly difficult for parents to plan for, will you commit future plans to dedicate space to child care options permanently within our schools?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Education I'd like to say that although it is always a plus to have schools with daycare facilities attached, this is something that has to be made at a local level based on enrolments in the local schools. The first priority for those particular schools is the K to 12 enrolment. However, we'd like to see, in cases where it's possible, more and more co-operation and collaboration between schools and daycare facilities.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that daycare costs are continuing to soar and given that it's often not worth it financially to return to work after parental leave, what incentives can your department currently provide in order to encourage parents to return to the workplace?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, it was in 2012 that the government changed its income threshold from \$35,000 up to \$50,000. That means that individuals making \$50,000 and below are eligible for a subsidy on their daycare somewhere in the range of up to 600 some-odd dollars per student. This is a very important piece that allows nearly 25,000 students to be supported on any given day through this particular program. It allows a lot of families to get financial assistance to make sure that they can return to the workforce if they so choose.

School Construction and Modernization

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, Satchel Paige, an old MLB player, once said, "If you tell a lie, always rehearse it." A few members of cabinet have crafted a story about the 50/70 school plan, but they really should have spent more time together in the rehearsal process. Last year the Education minister was a bit more up front

and admitted that a lot of these projects will take up to six years to complete. But the Infrastructure minister is declaring that all 120 projects will be done by 2016. With no shovels in the ground, which of these timelines should Albertans believe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat what I've said in this House before, and perhaps the hon. member will listen. We do have every intention of getting those schools open for the 2016 school year. I will remind the hon. member that the shovel in the ground isn't the first step. There's planning, and there's co-operation with the school boards across the province, with the Ministry of Education, and then with Infrastructure. We are working with the construction industry. We'll get those schools built. We're building Alberta. It's what Albertans want, and it's what that member wouldn't make happen.

Mr. Barnes: Two years in we've started zero schools.

Admitting their own incompetence, the government finally listened to the Calgary board of education's proposal to take care of building some local schools themselves. Will this government commit to giving other local school boards and local builders the chance to competitively build their own projects so that some of these projects actually have a shot at completion before the next election?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member says in the first question that we're not started and in the second question acknowledges that we're well along the way working with school boards and the construction industry. I think he'd better check his own notes. Of course, he doesn't write it himself; somebody upstairs tells him what to say.

But on this side we do the work. I can tell the hon. member and all Albertans that we're working closely with the construction industry, with the school boards. Our intention is to get those schools open for Albertans in 2016. It's still our intention. Building Alberta isn't something that's a joke, Mr. Speaker. It's something we take seriously. We're doing it. That hon. member would never get it done.

Mr. Barnes: It's a big promise. A lot of sensitivity over there.

With a massive sole-source contract for 19 P3 schools, with the Infrastructure minister then admitting no plan for 100 of the 120 school projects, with the Education minister flip-flopping between projected completion times of three and six years, tell me: will the Premier also stand behind his colleagues' promise that these schools will all be done before the next election?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want schools for their children, and they want modern schools for their children. This government has promised to deliver those schools, and this government will deliver those schools by the opening date that we indicated, which, I believe, is in the fall of 2016.

The Speaker: Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Kinship Care

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was reassured by the recent decision of Human Services to sign an information-sharing agreement with the Calgary Police Service that will be used to speed up the placement of children at risk with extended family members and close friends in kinship care arrangements. Anything

that can help to reduce the number of children that have to go into emergency foster care is certainly a good thing. My question is for the Minister of Human Services. How often is a tool like this needed in the city of Calgary?

2:20

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we could have as many as about 90 children a month that come into care in and around the Calgary area. Now, a lot of these children can come into care for a variety of different reasons, everything from issues of neglect to issues of very extreme abuse. It's my hope that those children, that have been through some sort of trauma, are provided with a safe, loving place to stay, hopefully with somebody that they know, a family member, a family friend. I'm hoping that this process will allow us to place them with someone they know within hours.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister and your department, for your sensitivity on a day like today in Alberta.

Given that privacy is such a delicate matter in these cases, should the general public be concerned about privacy breaches in light of such an agreement?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, my first and foremost priority is the protection of children and ensuring that the trauma that they may have experienced is reduced as much as possible as quickly as possible. My priority is to make sure that we get the data and information needed as soon as possible to make better assessments as soon as possible so that within a period of hours, not weeks or days – this is my hope – those children are within the arms of loved ones when they need it most.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you. My final question is for the Minister of Justice. What can be done by your department to reduce the time it takes for private citizens to get a security check for those who wish to volunteer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for that question. Security checks are typically processed by local police, and I'd be happy to facilitate a meeting with her local police detachment in Calgary-Glenmore.

One thing I just did want to mention is that we don't want to have excessive barriers to volunteer, but at the same time, as the Minister of Human Services has mentioned, children's safety is absolutely paramount. I have full confidence in our police service that they're effecting that as a number one priority.

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

Public Service Pensions

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Finance minister gives no proof to support his fears that the public pension plans are unsustainable due to unfunded liabilities and increased longevity of our hard-working public employees. In fact, these fears have been shown to be baseless by independent actuaries and economists. The Minister of IIR admitted last week that

“current . . . liabilities will be paid down over . . . 12 years.” To the Premier: why are you allowing this minister to forge ahead with his fabricated, fear-driven, Republican-style attack on hard-working Albertans?

Mr. Horner: Wow. Mr. Speaker, when we had meetings with the boards of all four of the pensions which the Ministry of Finance is the trustee of, one of the things that we talked about was sustainability into the future. One of the reasons we were talking about sustainability into the future was because of the \$7.5 billion unfunded liability of today. We also recognized at that time that the unfunded liability of today was being handled in the contribution rates currently paid by employers and employees, taxpayers and employees. What we're talking about is the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government contradicts itself in saying that public service pension plans are both healthy and unsustainable, yet they won't give the workers guaranteed cost-of-living increases, unlike high-ranking political staff. To the Premier again: why does the government only guarantee pensions for high-ranking political staff and threaten the well-being of the hard-working, everyday people that keep us safe, healthy, and make sure that the province is working?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the management employees pension plan is one of the ones that we're proposing to close off. In fact, we will be suggesting that after 2015 there would be no new entrants to that plan, that management would actually enter into the same plan that employees are in, probably with a supplementary.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to come back to this. What we care about is maintaining the pension promise for employees of today and tomorrow. The opposition, especially the opposition over there, should understand that we are protecting employees of the past, of the present, and the future for their benefit.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, they're going to retire our seniors into poverty.

The Finance minister says that he consulted with pension boards, but he didn't say that there was agreement because there wasn't any. Stripping pension plan boards of their powers and bullying these groups who disagree with them is very routine here given bills 28, 45, and 46. Premier, when will you stop this abuse of power?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's extremely unfortunate that every time a member opposite wants to raise an issue, they call it bullying. The fact of the matter is that there was consultation, as the hon. Provincial Treasurer mentioned. It started in 2012, and it continued through 2013 because we have an obligation to our employees to ensure a sustainable pension fund. It's about public discussion, appropriate public discourse, coming to a resolution. In government you have to make tough decisions. That's not bullying. That's listening, learning, and acting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Family and Community Support Services

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 40 years FCSS has supported community mental health programs, family intervention

services, child care, and seniors' programs, to name a few. Yet even as this government pays lip service to early intervention, FCSS funding has been virtually frozen for a decade. By failing to keep pace with population and inflation, FCSS has been cut by almost one-half since 2004. To the Minister of Human Services: why does his government care so little about supporting communities to care for their most vulnerable neighbours?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, our government makes substantial investments in protecting everyday, hard-working Alberta families and those that need our supports in times when they're down. FCSS is a great program. We're glad we have it, and we'll continue to work with all of our partners across this province to make sure Albertans are looked after when they need it most.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that underfunding forces FCSS to reduce or even eliminate funding for programs that keep seniors secure in their home or, say, keep families intact and successful and given that the slow demise of community supports is the predictable result of this PC government's misplaced priorities, why won't the Minister of Human Services replace empty platitudes with action and increase FCSS funding to make up for your years of neglect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year the Human Services budget is going up about 5.5 per cent. We have various different investments that we're making on the front line to help people in their most difficult times and to do a lot more early intervention work; for example, working with our parent link centres to be able to help reach families that may potentially have issues of domestic abuse. So we're investing very heavily in early intervention services, and we'll continue to work with our partners to make sure Albertans are protected.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you're not investing; you're freezing.

Now, given that when there's a press release to be sent, this government is the first to fill it with empty promises to help vulnerable Albertans and given that the real story is that by cutting almost 50 per cent, either services are significantly diluted or the number of people shut out from these early intervention services is growing drastically every single year, I'll ask again: why won't this minister increase funding to FCSS to make up for his government's decade of disregard?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this year's budget for Human Services, as I said, has an increase of about 5.5 per cent: 6 per cent in the area of child intervention, 5.9 per cent for support for persons with disabilities, 4.5 per cent for AISH, 6.7 per cent in the area of child care, 17 per cent in the area of homelessness. We're investing in areas that help support Albertans when they need it most, and we'll continue to do so.

Health Care System

Mr. Rowe: Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding are hearing of all the latest news involving Alberta Health Services mispending hundreds of millions of dollars, and they're outraged. Wait times to access surgery in the central zone are not improving. A year ago the average wait for a knee replacement was 26.6 weeks; today it's 33.2 weeks. Hip replacements were 21.3 weeks; now they're

27.1 weeks. Can someone from this government explain to my constituents why access to health care continues to get worse while spending continues to climb higher and higher?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred thousand people a year move to this province. The province is growing. New ways of treating patients are invented every year. There's new equipment every year. We do more hips, more hearts, more procedures every year on almost an exponential basis. More Albertans are getting service every year. Yes, it is important for us to get the wait times down so that they can get those services. But if you take a look at the system we have, people come from all across western Canada to the Stollery centre to get liver transplants, to get heart procedures done, to get the very high level of service that this province and this . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rowe: Given that long-term care spaces in Didsbury and Three Hills were cut so this government could save a dollar today only to have Alberta Health Services spend it on art consultants or high-priced image consultants, to the Premier: does this government really think it's right that families in my constituency are being separated when they enter continuing care as a result of the complete mismanagement of our health care dollars?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's not right that any family members are separated as a result of a health incident or deteriorating health. In fact, this government would like to ensure that we have in place the services that Albertans need so that there can be quality of life right through to the end of life. That's the goal of this government. But one cannot meet that goal by picking apart this piece and that piece and saying: if you saved a dollar on this corner, you could use it there. It's a very complex system. It requires intelligent people running the system. Yes, there are ways that we can improve the system, and we look every day to improve the system. I'd ask this hon. member and others to do that in a respectful way, to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Rowe: Given that patients waiting for something as serious as a scheduled heart surgery now sit on a waiting list for an average of 22 weeks, 30 per cent longer than they did last year, again to the Premier: how can Albertans have any confidence in this government and this Health minister when every performance indicator imaginable shows that access to health care is getting worse and worse, year over year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think what Albertans have confidence in is the fact that when they need services, they can get the services. Yes, there are wait times, and we need to work very, very diligently to get those wait times down to more acceptable levels, absolutely. You cannot build a system that's available at the moment a person needs services, but what we can build and what we have is a health service that's available when people need them on an urgent basis. There's a triage process. People get in when they need it. Yes, we need to work at making sure that the waits for the rest are shorter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Little Bow.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear from municipalities and constituents in northern Alberta about the inconsistencies of maintenance on our highways. My question this afternoon is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. In order to protect the long-term maintenance and the viability of our highways, what is your department doing to make sure that these roads will last for the lifetime of the projects?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. We share some common interests. Budget 2014 has an increase of \$200 million over the next three years for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. That's a total of \$735 million for highway rehab. This is equal to about 2,500 kilometres of provincial highways that will be rehabbed. You know, Alberta has a total of 31,000 kilometres of road, 28,000 of which are paved, and 4,000 bridges. We understand the need to protect these assets.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really excited to hear that. That's wonderful news.

The problem I have is that I continually hear about problems with delineator posts and signposts that have been down for many years, and these are very important, especially at rural intersections on a snowy, windy night. Can the minister assure me that these maintenance contracts will be looked at and make sure that these delineator posts for the safety of our rural residents will be installed again?

Mr. Drysdale: Delineator posts are often sheared off by snowplows, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we had a long, hard winter, so I think that there were a lot of posts that got shaved off this winter. Also, the movement of agricultural equipment, the wide equipment – I might even have been guilty of that myself once in a while, going down the highway. But, you know, highway maintenance contractors do inspect our delineator posts regularly for damage. We also followed the new national standards two years ago, and we increased the delineator strip from two inches to four inches.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final comment is on the quality of paint that the department seems to be using. Typically, once the lines have been painted on the highways, they seem to disappear within the first week or whenever the first rain comes. Could the minister assure us that paint that will be used with the increase in the budget will be of a higher quality?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, many Canadian provinces have problems with highway paint because, of course, like I said before, snow removal, the snowplows scraping the highway, is hard on our paint. Our maintenance contractors work every summer to repaint areas where needed. We test all paint for a full year to make sure it's suitable for Alberta roads. We did have a problem in 2010 and 2011 with our paint, but we worked with

manufacturers and painting applicators to develop a stronger testing process.

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

Highway 3 Intersection at Coalhurst

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the month of March concerned citizens from the town of Coalhurst canvassed the area to make three simple changes to the highway 3 intersection in town. The initiative was led by two outstanding community-minded individuals, Taylor Hewlett and Jake Vanschothorst, whose goal was to improve traffic flow and save lives. To the Minister of Transportation: these are priorities repeated countless times by the town of Coalhurst council and now by almost a thousand citizens in this petition. Will your government listen and make sure these improvements are a priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Drysdale: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Since becoming Minister of Transportation, I have heard from a number of people about the concerns with this intersection on highway 3. The increased traffic there is a concern. The problem is that, you know, the county of Lethbridge and the town of Coalhurst haven't always agreed on what the proper solution is there. My colleagues, especially the Minister of Municipal Affairs, have been meeting with the municipalities there, and I hear that they're coming up with an agreement. I don't want to go down there and do something if half of the people don't agree on the right process. But it sounds like we're close to an agreement on what needs to be done there, and when we have the agreement, we'll move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow. First supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that of the three suggestions that are in here, two of them come at relatively no cost to the province – the first one increases awareness by adding flashing lights and alerting motorists of the important intersection ahead, and the second one reduces speed in the area – and given that these suggestions are something the minister can do today, will the minister take my constituents' safety seriously? Please look at these ideas, and tell me if it's possible to implement them.

Mr. Drysdale: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at all the aspects of safety there. There are quite a few different things we can do there, but we want to make sure that we incorporate them all together at the same time and make the proper decision for the area. We'll be moving forward with that as soon as possible.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that the third suggestion is to increase the length of the deceleration lane that moves towards the tracks to improve visibility as you go north and given that this fall there's a plan to implement the overlay for highway 3, will this minister save taxpayers' money and address these very serious concerns and safety concerns by completing the third suggestion in tandem with this fall's highway 3 overlay?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we'll look at all suggestions. You know, that's one of them: right in, right out. There are quite a few different options there. There's a road in from the back, from the other side. So I'm sure we're going to be

doing some asphalt work there, and we'll work it all together in one process.

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

Provincial Diploma Examinations

Ms Kubinec: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent constituency week I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of grade 12 students in the Westlock library. We had a sit-down discussion about diploma exams. Not only were the students there, but we also had a school trustee from Pembina Hills division as well as a superintendent and R.F. Staples staff. A big part of the discussion was regarding the purpose the exams serve and the fact that they're worth 50 per cent of the grade. To the Minister of Education and perhaps the Premier: could you please explain to my constituents of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock why diploma exams are worth 50 per cent of the grade 12 students' final marks?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fairness to all students is a cornerstone of the whole diploma examination program. There can be a great variation in assessment across the province from one school board or one school to another. Assessment practices vary, but a diploma examination certifies a student's achievement against a province-wide standard. The equal weighting of the diploma examination with the school mark assures all students that their marks are fair and reliable. That's important because when they go to postsecondary, Alberta students actually do very well because of the respect for our diploma results.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that B.C. universities add 3 and a half per cent to student applicants from Alberta and Saskatchewan universities let in Alberta students who border on that line of acceptance, can you please tell me and my constituents if there's any discussion regarding changing the current practice of diploma exams counting 50 per cent, and could that be lowered?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the present time there is not a discussion about changing the percentage weight of the diploma exams. However, I would say this. Curriculum redesign is under way, and when you do curriculum design, you have to actually do examination redesign. As part of that examination redesign it would be appropriate to consider the weighting of those exams and how you can continue to assure that same standard of fairness with respect to marks across the province.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Kubinec: Thank you. Can the Premier please detail why there is a current shift to machine scoring for all written questions, not just multiple choice, and why this is being considered a benefit to students?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, technology is taking over our lives. The reality is that when you can do something using technology, it can reduce costs, and it can create more standardization. If it works appropriately – that's the real question

here, to test to see how and where it can be used appropriately – then those resources saved can be applied to other parts of the system, making even better investments in education for all students across the province. Machine scoring is one tool that is being explored, that's being investigated, being used where appropriate for Alberta students so that we can use the resultant resources in other places for more . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, that concludes the time for Oral Question Period. I've received a couple of notes. I'm just going to comment on them briefly, and we'll take a 30-second break to carry on with private members' statements.

Statement by the Speaker

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: First of all, with regard to preambles after the fifth main question I've reminded you every day except today, and a number of you sort of forgot that and went on with preambles. However, I also noted some disruptions when some people had what appeared to be a long preamble, but in actual fact they were using the word "given" ahead of their preamble, so to speak. We've always allowed that, but today it just seemed that there were some exceptionally long "givens" given.

Secondly, questions are permitted to chairs of our standing committees. As you would know from looking at the inside of your *Hansard* every day, we have 10 standing and special committees of the Legislative Assembly. However, the caveat, the rule, which has been followed since 1997, at least in this Chamber, is that those questions must pertain to agenda items or scheduling matters, not specifically the workings and machinations and procedures. I interpreted the question from Calgary-Fish Creek as being one pertaining to an agenda item. In fact, the hon. member had said something in the second supplemental about calling AHS before the committee. To me, that sounded like she wanted it placed on the agenda. That's how I interpreted it, and that's why it was allowed to proceed.

Thirdly, tomorrow I will remind you of what the proper uses and protocols are regarding tablets, iPads, and other electronic devices. I've received some notes from some members asking for clarification. I shouldn't have to remind you, but I will because it's in the procedural letter that I sent to you, I believe, a month or two ago; in any event, before session started. But I will present that again for your use tomorrow.

Thirty seconds from now let us continue with the private members' statements, starting with Calgary-Bow. Just before we hear from Calgary-Bow, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Bev DeSantis. Bev and her husband Carl are very good friends of mine and have been for many years. A little known fact about Bev is that it's a toss-up whether she loves Carl or Rod Stewart more, but

she loves them both. I know that, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have Bev join us here, and I hope she enjoys her visit to the Legislature. It's my honour to introduce her, and I invite members of the House to give her the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-Cross.

Alberta International Offices

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2014 and our government's building Alberta plan is about taking tangible actions to build new markets for our products that attract international investment so that we can keep investing in what matters most. Over the last year alone this government's focus on building new markets in Asia resulted in at least \$460 million in new investment and trade for Alberta. Alberta's international offices played a critical role in strengthening Alberta's relationships with foreign governments, promoting Alberta's businesses internationally, and telling Alberta's story on the world stage.

Last year 651 Alberta companies worked with our international offices to advance their international business objectives. Having on-the-ground resources enabled us to facilitate more than 1,400 business introductions, resulting in 197 negotiations and follow-up meetings. Our offices helped to facilitate 128 trade and investment missions to Alberta and over 270 missions to markets abroad in 2013.

In today's competitive global marketplace this work is critical. The expansion of our international office network, supported by Budget 2014, will substantially strengthen Alberta's presence internationally, enhancing our ability to attract investment, facilitate trade, and support Alberta's businesses. This will result in more rapid economic growth and diversification of the economy and provide companies with access to new technologies and expertise.

Our government will continue opening new markets to create more economic opportunity, investment, jobs, and revenues that support the programs and services Albertans rely upon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Wrestling Championships

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to highlight a very important event for youth that was held at Lester B. Pearson high school in my constituency on March 7 and 8. The 2014 Alberta Schools' Athletic Association provincial championship had 302 top wrestlers from across Alberta compete this year. Fifty-four urban and rural schools were represented throughout the province.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, wrestling is a very elite level of competition that showcases the ability and the talent of our young athletes. All of the competitors worked hard to reach their goals. Their commitment to training and their drive to succeed are admirable.

Mr. Speaker, there were 84 gold, silver, and bronze medals in 28 weight categories that were awarded to the winning athletes. They competed as individuals and contributed points for their school in the team population for both boys and girls. The schools that had the most points received a plaque for first, second, and third place.

In addition to the athletes at Lester B. Pearson school, they hosted 400 spectators, family members, coaches, and officials. One hundred student volunteers and 80 staff members welcomed and assisted guests. The wonderful brunch, that was prepared and served by Pearson students and staff, was enjoyed by well over 600 people.

I would like to thank Greg Weir, principal at Lester B. Pearson high school, and recognize outstanding coaches Lindsay Marsh and Kai Kleinitz. Their tremendous efforts in organizing the planning of this athletic event was a year in the making.

Wrestling is a sport that requires determination, sportsmanship, and excellence. I would ask members of the Assembly and you, Mr. Speaker, to please join me in offering our warmest congratulations to each and every competitor who participated at the championship competition because each of them was an inspiration to all of us.

2:50 Flood Recovery and Mitigation in High River

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, last summer's flood devastated High River, and my hometown is still struggling to get back on its feet. Nowhere in Alberta were as many people's homes and businesses destroyed by the raging waters as they were in High River.

This government often describes the flood as a \$6 billion event. Sadly, very little of that money has actually gone to the people who were hurt the most. Houses still sit empty and derelict. Businesses are still shuttered. The province of Alberta is getting at least \$2.8 billion in federal dollars to pay flood costs, but the amount of money that has gone to rebuilding homes in High River is in the \$48 million range. Less than 2 per cent of the money spent on the flood has made its way to those who were the hardest hit. Lots of money has flowed to sole-source contractors, who have been too slow, too expensive, and too uncaring of the needs of our communities.

This file has been grossly mismanaged. The government doesn't like hearing that from us, but anyone who's had to deal with the disaster recovery program, the messed-up contracting process, and the endless bureaucracy knows it to be true. It isn't just the contractors that have messed up. Parts of this file that belong directly to the government are also in chaos, and that is hurting everyone in High River. For example, this government's reliance on the 1992 flood maps and its reluctance to update the maps are having an impact on everyone in High River, even those lucky few who were not flooded.

You see, Mr. Speaker, without new and accurate flood maps insurance companies do not know how to assess and mitigate the risk. Without that data insurance companies don't want to write homeowner policies in High River, and the few who do write policies have dramatically increased their rates and their deductibles and have substantially curtailed their coverage. The absence of adequate and reasonable insurance coverage threatens the viability of every business in High River. It also threatens the economic and emotional security of every resident.

The government needs to solve this problem. It's the right thing to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder or someone on behalf of.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Little Bow I'm tabling two different petitions asking for the government to take a look at extending and moving the westbound deceleration lane, moderately reducing the speed on both sides of the Coalhurst intersection, and installing yellow flashing warning-light signs on both sides of the Coalhurst intersection.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Acting Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plan regulations the 2012-2013 provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Griffiths, Minister of Service Alberta, responses to Written Question 16, Written Question 17, Written Question 18, and Written Question 29, asked for by Mr. Kang on April 14, 2014.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Famous Five

The Speaker: Hon. members, we don't appear to have any points of order today. However, we do have a minute or two on the clock, so if you'll allow me, I'd like to just make a brief statement about the Famous Five.

I'm pleased to announce the installation of an enhanced exhibit in our Legislature Building. If you visit the fifth floor of our

building, you'll be very pleased to see that a stunning new tribute to the accomplishments of the Famous Five abounds there. The Famous Five, of course, were and are Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, and Nellie McClung. These five women shared the belief that all women play an essential role in politics and, if given the chance, could contribute a great deal to building a better Canada. Prior to October 18, 1929, the BNA Act did not consider women as "persons," which, in turn, prevented women from service within the Senate of Canada, where they could fully participate in the parliamentary system and effect meaningful change.

The group of five, however, challenged the interpretation of the act and marched forward to change the status of women in Canada. Their legal battle, which is known to all of us as the Persons Case, set a precedent for how the word "person" would be interpreted thereafter by the highest court of Canada, thus planting the seeds of reform within our legislative and judicial systems. In their ruling the Privy Council described the BNA Act as "a living tree capable of growth and expansion within its natural limits." From this, the living tree doctrine was established, changing the way Canadian law was interpreted and, within that law, forever entrenching women's rights.

The ruling on the Persons Case remains a landmark decision, and the Famous Five continue to symbolize not only women's rights but also the evolution of Canadian equality. They were posthumously appointed honorary Senators in 2009. The Famous Five: their names are now and forever known to us all.

The exhibit is currently open for public viewing as part of our free guided tours. I hope to further honour the legacy of the Famous Five on the 85th anniversary of the ruling of the Persons Case, which will be in October. However, I bring it to your attention now because I did not want to keep the exhibit closed until October since we receive thousands upon thousands of visitors here, and I wanted it open. I'm just telling you why we are not doing an official opening at this time. It will be done later in conjunction with the anniversary.

Hon. members, we are now at the end of our afternoon sitting. Routine has completed, and we are going to proceed to estimates. At 3:30 p.m. the Families and Communities Committee will consider the estimates for Justice and Solicitor General in committee room A. At the same time, Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for International and Intergovernmental Relations in committee room B. Tonight at 7 you're all invited to the Families and Communities Committee meeting, where they will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Culture in committee room A.

That being said, the House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:58 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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