



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 1, 2014

Issue 9

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 63 Wildrose: 14 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1

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Horne	Rowe
Kennedy-Glans	Sarich
Lemke	Stier
Luan	

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Amery	Lukaszuk
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 1, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us pray. Dear Lord, as we labour diligently on behalf of those whom we serve, let us act and speak courageously in support of those who are unable to do so for themselves. Amen.

Please remain standing now for the singing of our national anthem. Today we're very pleased to welcome our leader in that regard, Ms Colleen Vogel, who works for visitor services. Let's join in and participate in the language of our choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Thank you, Ms Vogel. Please be seated.

Hon. members, as you know, it is the tradition of the House to pay tribute to current or former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met and to do so at the very first opportunity. Therefore, it is with deep sorrow that I rise to advise you of the passing of Mr. Henry Woo. However, we have not yet had a response back from his family as to when they might be able to join us. We anticipate doing a tribute for Mr. Woo later this week on some given day, so please stand attentive on that point.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, followed by Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some home-schoolers from Wetaskiwin: 16 visitors, students and their leaders. The leaders today are Mrs. Melanie Krause, Mrs. Maria Chronik, Mrs. Thérèse Klopfenstein, and Mrs. Corrie Vande Burgt. I would like to invite them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 48 talented grade 6 students from Centennial elementary school and their chaperones: Michelle Leong, Marnie Trapp, Sonya Johnston, Christine Oleksiw, and Angel Giovanni. I ask all the students and their chaperones from Centennial school to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Dorward: Mr. Speaker, my wife, Janice Dorward, graduated grade 6 from Forest Heights elementary school in my constituency, and we're welcoming them to the Assembly this week through the school. They're here with their teacher Frau Marion Fritz and Fräulein Jessica Arzt. We have 26 students, and I would like them to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. They're in the members' gallery. Please stand up.

The Speaker: Are there other school groups?

If not, let us move on with other important guests.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you a group of medical students from the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. Each year a group of medical students from both programs visit the Legislature to meet MLAs and share their concerns about health care with elected officials. This year they're hoping to meet with some of the members regarding tanning beds and minors. I ask that the students rise as I call their names and receive the customary warm welcome from this Assembly: Raheem Suleman, chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; Justin Khunkhun; Justine Hames; Jennifer Yan Fei Chen; Kirsten Sjonnesen; Samuel Quan; Sarah Hanafi; Patrick Vallance; Jeremy Christensen; Michelle Huie; Brandon Christensen; Nicole Mensik. And from the University of Calgary: Michael Arget, a senior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; John Van Tuyl, a junior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee; Adam Burgess; Emily Macphail; Christina Harzan; Eric Campbell; Mimi Tran; Nicholas Monfires.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, followed by the Minister of Service Alberta.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Elder Walter Bonaise and Mr. Blaine Knott. Walter is a Cree singer and Elder from Little Pine, Saskatchewan. He's travelled across Canada performing traditional Cree songs and dance, many of which have passed through generations. Walter is the author of *Listening to Elders Telling Stories Sitting in a Circle* and the resident Elder of NAIT and a lecturer at the University of Alberta and the University of Manitoba. Blaine is a member of the Peguis First Nation in Manitoba and has spent several years visiting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. I'd like to thank Elder Bonaise and Mr. Knott for infusing us with a greater understanding of aboriginal culture in all sectors of society and ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Khan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very important individuals that have been instrumental in the completion of the Condominium Property Act. From my ministry – and I'll ask them to rise as I say their names – we have Beth Jenkins, Kelly Refah, Mark Ammann, and Brent Kornack. All of these people have worked tirelessly through stakeholder consultations that span years to develop the best possible legislation for both condominium consumers and the developers across this province. Condo living is becoming an increasingly attractive option for people of this province, and it's because of

the hard work of these valuable folks here that Albertans are able to have confidence in their choice of condo living.

I would also like to introduce three people from the developer side who have come together with the common goal of making the Condominium Property Act as strong as it can be. We have from the Canadian Home Builders' Association Jim Rivait, and I'll ask him to rise as well. We have Nicholas Carels of Streetside Development, and we have the president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association and also representing the Daytona Group of Companies, Tally Hutchinson, who, Mr. Speaker, is also a valuable member in St. Albert and a tremendous citizen involved in the community in St. Albert. It's these folks who have been consistently involved in the consultations between government and industry with the common goal to create the appropriate framework for the industry to thrive and to produce the best results possible for the consumer. All seven of these folks, as you can see, are in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask all members to provide them with the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Red Deer-South.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my guests Joel and Sapphira Lewin. Unfortunately, Joel's spouse, Jennie, is at home today taking care of Vienna, who's feeling under the weather. Sapphira is in grade 6 and learning about democracy in her school, so she wanted to see first-hand what goes on in this building. Jennie and Joel are also both strong advocates for inclusive education in Alberta, and I'd like to thank them for their dedication and hard work on this. The Lewins, like myself, are proud to call Beverly home, and I'd now like to ask Joel and Sapphira to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the president of Ports-to-Plains Alliance, Michael Reeves. Alberta joined the Ports-to-Plains Alliance in 2009, the first Canadian member of the alliance, and since then Mr. Reeves has been a great friend and ally for Alberta. This unique nonprofit, nonpartisan, community-driven advocacy group, led by Mr. Reeves, is made up of representatives from Alberta as well as Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Mr. Reeves has been and continues to be a great supporter of Alberta's position on mandatory country of origin labelling and has helped ensure that the facts about Alberta's responsible and sustainable energy development practices are presented. We thank him for his continued support of our province. Michael is joined today by Elvira Smid, who is also the executive director of the eastern Alberta trade corridor. I'd like to ask Mr. Reeves and Ms Smid to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really delighted to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a new staff member in my fabulous constituency office of Edmonton-Centre. Angelika Matson is

joining us in the public gallery. Angelika, I'd ask you to rise. She has joined the staff there as the new social media person helping me out. You can imagine, when she started 10 days ago, how deep into the deep end she was thrown, and she is doing the front crawl very nicely, thank you. Please join me in welcoming her.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special lady who has been helping us to grow our family tree and the Alberta population, of course. She has given us our first grandchild, Dylan. She is Mimi Tran, my precious daughter-in-law. Mimi is here with a group of medical students, her colleagues, to keep us informed of the danger of skin cancer among our youth due to the usage of tanning machines. Now I would like to ask Mimi to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In the members' gallery is a particularly passionate young medical student, who is passionate about prevention. She is here with a number of other medical students, as mentioned by the Health minister, calling on the government to show leadership in prevention. Tanning beds contribute substantially to melanoma, sometimes a fatal condition among our population, and are banned in most other provinces in the country. I'd ask Michelle Huie to stand and be recognized.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Karina Pillay. Karina is a second-year medical student and also came to talk to us about the dangers of using tanning beds, especially amongst youth. But very special to me is that Karina is a former mayor of Slave Lake. She was the mayor of Slave Lake when we had the devastating fires that went through, and she's the lady that all of us worked with to ensure a great recovery for that community. I would like everyone from this Assembly to extend our warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Members' Statements

The Speaker: A reminder that you have two minutes to offer your statements. Let's start with Calgary-North West and follow up with Chestermere-Rocky View.

Calgary Sexual Health

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize one of the important organizations providing instruction and education to the youth of our province. Calgary Sexual Health has been offering services to Calgary schools for 42 years now, and our kids are all the better for it. Why is sexual health education so important? Health Canada says: sexual health education is a major part of personal health and healthy living; it should be available to all Canadians as an important part of health promotion programs and services. The positive outcomes of quality sexual

health education are self-esteem, respect for themselves and others, nonexploitive sexual relations, informed reproductive choices, and a reduction of disease and unintended pregnancy: all good things, I think we can agree.

So what makes a good sexual health program? It has to be inclusive of the population it targets, it has to be evidence based and evaluated, and it must be a co-ordinated effort between Health, Education, Human Services, and all the other public and nonprofit groups at all levels of government. Calgary Sexual Health is at the forefront of this work, providing school-based education programs, community education, and counselling. They've been providing comprehensive sexual health education programs for 40 years, reaching 8,000 students every year. Their WiseGuyz program teaches young men the importance of challenging stereotypes about masculinity, bullying and homophobia, and intimate partner violence. It is groundbreaking and transformative.

One of my very favourite things about Calgary Sexual Health is that they helped found Camp fYrefly Calgary, Canada's only national leadership retreat for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited, intersexed, queer, questioning, and allied youth. You cannot visit this camp and not come away a profoundly changed person, educated and more compassionate about these issues.

Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud Calgary Sexual Health and its courageous staff for everything they do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, this morning a damning infrastructure report was released about the state of Alberta's health facilities. While facilities are given a priority rating, there isn't much of a link between a building's rating and the choice about which ones get money for repairs. Now, we know what this means, sadly: favouritism and political decision-making. It's clear that this government has grossly overspent and misprioritized in the past and is now sleeping in the bed that it made for itself.

As the Education advocate, Mr. Speaker, I have asked many questions about school infrastructure in this Chamber. Since last election this government has promised 105 new schools for communities all over this province. But in this Chamber when I asked the question, "How many of these schools are currently under construction?" as simple a question as that seems to be, the minister offers no answer. Well, do some research, and you'll sadly learn that the number is somewhere around zero.

Modular classrooms are yet another problem. During the by-elections the Minister of Education announced two portable classrooms for a school in his own riding. This particular school was at number seven on the CBE priority list. Undoubtedly, the queue was jumped to help secure support in the middle of a by-election. Now, we hear promises about a new era of integrity, of management, and trust. This is not integrity.

Wildrose has called and pleaded for a public prioritized list for infrastructure projects. The purpose is so simple yet so crucial. We need to take the politics out of school infrastructure decision-making. We need schools, we need modulars, and we need them now. We must allocate them in a fair and transparent way. Adopt the Wildrose plan for infrastructure and take politics out of the equation. Don't just talk the talk on it; walk the walk. And while you're at it, give some clear, concise answers from the front bench that Albertans expect and deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

1:50

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation for Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's 1:50, and we must begin Oral Question Period, but before we do so today, I want to advise you of some adjustments that will be made to the Oral Question Period and to Members' Statements rotations resulting from the recent changes in caucus membership. The House leaders for the government and the Official Opposition caucuses provided my office today with a memo dated November 27, 2014, that encloses a revised Oral Question Period rotation, affecting only those positions held by those two caucuses in the rotation.

On days 2 and 4 of the Oral Question Period rotation question 16 will now be asked by a private member from the government caucus in the positions formerly held by the Official Opposition. Members should note that this change will affect the questions scheduled for today, which is day 4 in the rotation.

The House leaders' agreement provided to me earlier today is silent with respect to the Members' Statements rotation. Accordingly, I have tried to preserve the intent of the May 2012 House leaders' agreement but have made an adjustment that takes into account the change in caucus composition. It is, of course, open to House leaders to propose an alternative if they wish by way of an agreement concerning Members' Statements.

In the Members' Statements rotation for week 4 on Wednesday the final Members' Statements position will be held by the government caucus, and the Official Opposition will now have only one statement on that day. The current week is week 3 in the Members' Statements rotation, and as a result, this change will not affect the schedule of Members' Statements outlined in the projected sitting days calendar until Wednesday, December 10, assuming I do not hear from the House leaders before that date.

These changes to the rotations are in addition to the changes I announced on Tuesday, November 18, 2014, at page 11 of *Hansard*, changes that were to accommodate the independent member at that time.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Let us begin. Thirty-five seconds max for the question; 35 seconds max for the answer.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, world oil prices are crashing through the floor, and we're seeing just how poorly this government has prepared us for what's to come. When energy revenues were never higher, they blew through every penny and then some, racking up \$11 billion in debt in the process. That's like winning the lottery, spending it all, and maxing out the line of credit all at once. To the Finance minister: if his government couldn't manage the budget when oil was \$100, what's going to happen when it gets below \$70?

The Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just gave the second-quarter update, and we're looking right now at a surplus of \$933 million on our operating budget. We said that we'll balance the budget for the rest of this year, and we will. We'll be working towards balancing the budget for '15-16.

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're going to be borrowing more than \$2 billion, and that's with oil averaging \$90 a barrel.

Not only is this government lousy at dealing with ups and downs in oil prices; it can't seem to get its own message straight. On Wednesday the Finance minister's fiscal update pegged oil at \$75 between now and April. Forty-eight hours later the Premier issued a revision, saying that oil would actually be between \$65 and \$75 for the rest of the fiscal year. To the Finance minister: how can Albertans trust his government to manage us through this budget crisis when it can't even get its message straight from day to day?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said in the House before, the price of oil is very volatile. When we came out with our second-quarter update, we looked at \$75 oil. It was down as low as \$65; it's now at \$70. So I'm not going to sit here and try and decide what the price of oil is going to be. We're going to budget on a prudent number and make sure that we balance the budget and provide the services Albertans need and deserve.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government's words and actions over the last week hardly inspire confidence. They can't decide how to budget for oil prices. They won't acknowledge the debt hole they've put us in. They haven't come clean on which election promises they're willing to break to keep the budget from completely falling apart. About the only thing they're clear on is that they want to raise taxes. To the Finance minister: when is there going to be a moment of honesty, when he'll tell Albertans what is actually going on?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I've answered this question numerous times in the House. I have said that we are going to make sure that we have our spending under control. We've asked all our departments to look at their budgets to make sure that we cut any waste out of those budgets. We are going to provide the core services that Albertans need and deserve, that being health care, education, seniors, and the most vulnerable, and we'll work towards that end for the rest of this year and next year.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition leader. Second main set of questions.

Hospital Infrastructure Capital Planning

Ms Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of health care, Wildrose has been asking about the government's mishandling of hospital infrastructure for years. We have asked about mouldy kitchens, sewer backups, mice infestations, and leaky roofs. We have asked about a billion dollars' worth of deferred maintenance. We have asked why hospital infrastructure spending decisions don't seem to be based on objective criteria. We have asked why hospitals with the necessary equipment and staff are mothballed when they could help deal with wait times. Will the Health minister admit that these conditions are absolutely unacceptable for Canada's wealthiest province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, our hospitals are safe, well run, and well managed. We will spend \$220 million on the maintenance of our facilities over a three-year period. Yes, we have an infrastructure deficit. But you know something? These are substantial costs to build brand new facilities, which we're doing. We're trying to balance expenditures on repairing older facilities with building new ones because the demand in this province is so

great. This is a growing province, a province where hundreds of thousands of people have come in the last few years. We have to make sure that we find a balance between those communities that are growing and those that are staying a little quieter.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, how can the Health minister say that they're well managed when it costs 25 per cent more to run a hospital in Alberta than the average in the rest of the country?

A media report from this weekend highlights what Wildrose has been talking about for years. This government's infrastructure decisions are highly politicized and have no basis in priority. AHS spends millions rating our hospital infrastructure and deciding on priority lists only to have the government make purely political decisions on which projects get funded. This is wasteful, unethical, and it doesn't put patients first. Will the minister agree to publish a public, prioritized project list for health infrastructure?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, each year Alberta Health Services puts together a priority list, a list of projects that we'd like to try to do, but it is not an unlimited budget. As our Finance minister indicated, we're projecting oil to be under \$75 a barrel; hopefully, somewhat more. As a result of that, projects are planned, and we hope to do them, but sometimes they have to be delayed because of the challenges we face with funding.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's about setting priorities, doing it objectively, and actually following the plan.

Albertans spend more per capita on health than just about any other province, but our results don't show it. Our waiting lists are unacceptable. There are solutions like using the extra capacity in rural hospitals. My own home town of High River has an effective, full-service hospital that performs hernia procedures, which takes pressure off the Calgary hospitals, but this model is ignored elsewhere. Last year I visited a rural hospital which uses its operating room for storage. Why won't this government use our rural hospitals to make Alberta's health system work?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We value our rural hospitals and what they can supply. We're just going through a process of evaluating what options we have in order to increase opportunities. We've got to make sure that the right staff is there and ensure that these facilities can deliver the kind of services they're expected to deliver to the people of their area. You know, health care is a very complicated business. As a result of that, it takes a great deal of planning in order to use a variety of facilities to deliver those programs.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, this government has been hollowing out services in rural Alberta for years now.

The Speaker: Third and final main question.

School Construction Funding

Ms Smith: When it comes to new schools, it seems that the Premier has written cheques that can't be cashed. In the middle of an election in which both he and his Education minister were seeking seats, the Premier slapped together a commitment for 55 new schools and 20 modernizations. The timing was curious although the news was welcome. Today, however, the Calgary board of education says that it needs an additional \$200 million to

meet the Premier's commitment on just 10 of those projects, this while the Premier is talking about belt tightening. To the Education minister: what does he say to parents now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an unprecedented capital build for school infrastructure in this province. We continue to press ahead to build these schools. We have been in discussions with many school boards to see how, in fact, we can expedite the process to build those 55 new schools that were announced just a number of months ago. Our intention is to build them and to build them as soon as possible for the children of this province.

Ms Smith: Well, I can see why the former chair of the Calgary board of education doesn't want to answer the question, but I hardly think that that answer is going to be of much comfort, Mr. Speaker.

The announcement on October 8 is looking less and less like a serious commitment to build schools and more and more like a crass political ploy to win votes. The government has committed a fraction of what it actually needs to get these projects built in the communities that need them, but they did get the headline that they needed in a hotly contested by-election. To the Education minister: why is his government playing politics with our children's future again?

2:00

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, the last thing we're going to do is play politics with the future of our children. I can tell you that during the by-election and during the leadership race the Premier heard very clearly, our government heard very clearly that the number one thing that Albertans want their government to do is to listen to their priorities and to respond to them. Building new schools is exactly what people across the province want us to do, and we're committed to follow through to do just that.

Ms Smith: Mr. Speaker, the October 8 school announcement appears intended to achieve one objective and one objective only: to get the Premier and his Education minister their seats in the Assembly. Albertans are tired of this government manipulating them during elections only to be kicked to the curb after the votes are counted. There are only two ways to look at this. Either the government failed to account for how they'd actually deliver on the promise of new schools or they never had any intention of keeping their promise in the first place. To the Education minister: which is it?

Mr. Dirks: Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that one thing Albertans are tired of is negativity. One thing Albertans want this government to do is to respond to their priorities. Two hundred and thirty school projects are presently either being built, have already been opened, are in the planning stages, or are in the permitting stages, and we will follow through on every one of them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition.

Hospital Infrastructure Capital Planning (continued)

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Liberal government will fix Alberta's broken health system. For over 40 years this PC government has been great at building hospitals to buy votes, but their record at maintaining, staffing, and running them is appalling. Our hospitals are crumbling, and Albertans are suffering. Today an *Edmonton Journal* story says that decisions

about where funding for hospitals should go is arbitrary, secretive, and political, sort of like the school decision in the Calgary-Elbow by-election. To the Health minister: when will this tired, old government stop making decisions based on political gain and start doing what's best for the health of Albertans?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've invested in hospital infrastructure: 42 major health capital projects are under development; the three-year Health capital plan 2014 to 2017 is \$2.6 billion; maintenance, \$225 million over three years; South Health Campus in Calgary; Kaye Edmonton clinic; cancer centres in Lethbridge and Red Deer; new major upgrades in Lethbridge, Edson, High Prairie, Medicine Hat, and Grande Prairie. I'm not sure what else we could do. We are doing a lot in this province.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, that's interesting. According to the *Edmonton Journal* story, in the last five years of the 38 projects that AHS listed as its most urgent priorities – the Royal Alexandra, University of Alberta, Foothills, and, hey, even the Misericordia hospital would be amongst the top – only a third have received government approval. It's time for this government to come clean, tell Albertans which hospitals are going to get fixed, which are going to get replaced, and in what order. The public has a right to know. To the Health minister: will you publish a priority list for the renovation or replacement of Alberta's rundown health facilities?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that some of our facilities need work, and we've done that. The Misericordia hospital: investing \$25 million. I was over at the Royal Alex the other day and went through it. Yes, there's need of work, but we've given them some money to do some planning to see what we need to do there. There is investment in all kinds of projects across this province, and we will continue to do that.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of AHS's priority list is yet to be approved. AHS is an organization that minister is responsible for.

According to the *Edmonton Journal* AHS's deferred maintenance stands at over \$1 billion. It is clear that this PC government has created this problem and has placed the lives of Albertans at risk. To the Minister of Health: when will your Conservative government take action on this issue and follow the Liberal lead and commit to spending the \$1 billion federal health transfer on the billion-dollar maintenance problem your government created?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we're investing 220 million plus dollars on maintenance and projects. Yes, there is deferred maintenance, and we'll try to catch up. But, you know, there are responsibilities we have all over the province to make sure we improve places throughout Alberta. I realize there is a challenge in Edmonton with the Misericordia and the Royal Alex, but I know there are other issues we need to deal with. That's why we're spending \$220 million. We'll continue to do that to make sure all hospitals across the province are treated equally.

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

Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday this government announced it will be introducing its own version of Bill 202, claiming that their bill will balance parental rights with student rights. Now, the PC version of this bill ensures that school

boards that choose to block gay-straight alliances can continue to do so even if students want them. Now, I asked the Premier this question last week, and he didn't answer, so to the Minister of Human Services: will you explain to this Assembly how a voluntary extracurricular club set up to form friendships and create a safe, supportive peer group infringes on the rights of anyone else who chooses not to participate?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll ask the Minister of Justice to comment shortly, but let's be very careful to not deal with the actual contents of a bill that is anticipated to be up for debate later today.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Pardon my voice; I'm a little bit sick.

That is exactly what I was going to say, in fact, that this bill will be introduced this afternoon by the Member for Calgary-North West. I would invite this member to actually join in the debate on this. You know, Mr. Speaker, we will be having a free vote in this caucus. How about the fourth party?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know, it hasn't been tabled, so the rule does not apply here.

Now, students who are victims of bullying are far more likely to drop out and find themselves in at-risk situations. Studies show that up to 40 per cent of Alberta youth living on the street identify as LGBTQ. Surely you understand that the failure to provide the kind of peer support found in GSAs has real and painful consequences. To the minister in charge of child protection: how can you claim to be protecting children when your government puts pandering to social conservatives ahead of child and youth safety?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve to be treated with respect and to feel welcome in any community and have healthy relationships. One of the things we recently released was Alberta's plan for promoting healthy relationships and preventing bullying. We released that last week. It's a conversation we need to have so Albertans can live, learn, work, and play, and be supported in all of their communities.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister claims that all Albertans deserve an inclusive and tolerant learning environment, yet they plan to single out LGBTQ students by permitting school boards to ban GSAs. Other clubs aimed at supporting marginalized kids are allowed. I'm pretty sure not one single Albertan would publicly defend the notion of banning an antiracism club. To the Minister of Human Services: bullying based on homophobia and bullying based on racism are equally offensive, so why is your government treating them differently?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to note again that it's about promoting healthy relationships everywhere so Albertans can live, learn, work, and play in environments that are very safe and caring. We know there are issues with individuals that need support, and Human Services and this government will continue to support Albertans who need support. Again, it's about public awareness. It's about conversations. It's encouraging our children and youth to have safe places to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

AltaLink Sale

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Berkshire Hathaway received approval to purchase AltaLink. They will now control 80 per cent of the flow of electricity over Alberta's 21,000 kilometres of transmission lines. Given that Berkshire Hathaway already controls 300,000 kilometres of transmission lines and 28,000 megawatts of generation in the western United States, how does adding to Berkshire Hathaway's market dominance over both transmission and generation advance Alberta's competitive electricity market?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Indeed, the Alberta Utilities Commission has reviewed the sale of AltaLink to Berkshire Hathaway. Prior to that, the federal government reviewed the sale and determined it would likely be in the public interest. Alberta reviewed it from the point of view of the protection of consumers. They determined there would be no harm. I'm grateful that there's a process in place. The process was followed. I'm also grateful that Alberta's electrical system and our energy system are under such scrutiny and are so welcoming to foreign investors.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What assurances can this ministry provide that Berkshire Hathaway will not legally manipulate electricity prices to the disadvantage of Alberta's ratepayers?

2:10

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, the day before the sale transmission is a regulated business; the day after the sale it will be, too. We have excellent processes in place to ensure that Alberta consumers are protected, and they will remain in place.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Anglin: Thanks. Given that Alberta's Utilities Commission has no authority or jurisdiction to review or monitor the electricity market in the United States, knowing that Berkshire has no authority or jurisdiction to review or monitor the electricity market in Alberta, what rules and regulations are in place to stop Berkshire Hathaway from legally adjusting the flow or supply in one jurisdiction only to raise the price of electricity in the next, or the other, jurisdiction?

Mr. Oberle: We're in hypothetical territory here, Mr. Speaker, and I can't answer the question. We certainly don't regulate the electrical system in the United States. We do in Canada. In Alberta we have the Market Surveillance Administrator. We have an excellent process, and we have excellent rules in place. They will be enforced.

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

Inclusive Activities in Schools

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago school boards across Alberta were asked to provide information

on antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances in Alberta school jurisdictions. My question is for the Minister of Education. Can you tell us what you have heard from school boards with respect to antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances in Alberta schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did ask Alberta school jurisdictions if they could report on the number of antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, and gay-straight alliances. I'm pleased to inform you that a hundred per cent of jurisdictions did respond. They have multiple initiatives to support kids in our schools. Based on the combined responses, in Alberta schools what I have at present are 637 antibullying clubs, 665 diversity clubs, and 94 gay-straight alliances, so almost 1,400 clubs in our schools. I'll be tabling this information later.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member. First supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Your reply indicates that not all schools have clubs identified as GSAs. How does this information provide you with a level of confidence that schools are supporting all vulnerable students?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we've said a number of times in the Assembly, there is no room for intolerance in our education system, and we continue to make the promotion of safe and dignified and respectful environments a priority. Schools are supporting students, as I've just mentioned, through a wide variety of clubs – antibullying clubs, diversity clubs, gay-straight alliances – and there will be other types as well, hundreds of clubs across Alberta. They may go by different names, but they're all there to support our students.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will this information inform future policies to support students who want to organize a club or GSA in their school?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question. The information is helpful, Mr. Speaker, in telling us how school boards are supporting students in their schools. As we've just heard, there are many different, diverse approaches that school boards use to support students. I fully support and our government fully supports gay-straight alliances and other kinds of school clubs as well, but we also respect the rights of school boards to make decisions about what is going to be appropriate in their jurisdiction according to their priorities to make sure we have safe and caring environments for all students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A five-month investigative report by the *Edmonton Journal* today, which I'll be tabling later, has uncovered a number of disturbing details about the state of Alberta's hospital infrastructure. That report blames years of PC political manipulation for crumbling facilities, empty departments, secret funding, and a deferred maintenance bill of over a billion dollars. To the Minister of Infrastructure. This

situation is reaching a crisis point for communities across Alberta. What is your plan to fix this mess?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. In fact, our Premier has said that we will take a very planned and deliberate approach and make deferred maintenance a priority of this government. I would say that in the last number of months we have increased school board infrastructure maintenance funding by \$100 million, over \$150 million in the area of seniors' lodges, and I would say we're looking forward to making additional changes as we develop the budget.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that one of the biggest issues this report underlines is this government's use of infrastructure for political manipulation and gain and given that this minister clearly hasn't improved, as evidenced by the recent sod-turnings for untendered projects and queue-jumping of schools, Minister, will you do the right thing and publish a full, public, prioritized infrastructure list like the Wildrose has been asking for for years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're spending \$2.6 billion in health facilities in our current capital plan – \$2.6 billion – and \$222 million of that is being allocated directly to Alberta Health Services for maintenance projects. Guess who makes the decisions on those projects. It's Alberta Health Services that determines which projects are to be finished at what time.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That same report says that Alberta Infrastructure's method of rating health facilities is ineffective and physical evaluations by private consultants are often manipulated or even rejected by this government in favour of political decision-making. Once again to the minister. Albertans need a health care system that works. Will you start making funding decisions based on need and stop playing politics with our hospitals?

Mr. Bhullar: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have \$222 million that is being allocated in the current capital plan for maintenance projects with Alberta Health Services. That money is allocated to Alberta Health Services, who then determines which projects they need to fund in which order. That's what we do with our educational funding as well as our postsecondary funding. We allow them to make the decisions on their priorities. That's what prudent governments do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by Calgary Buffalo.

Education System Efficiency

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this Assembly is aware, I've taught children for 36 years. In that time and since then a universal complaint of teachers was the amount of work that our educators are forced to put in outside of the classroom, in particular into administrative work such as report cards and IPPs.

Teachers spend hours on report cards and IPPs, and it takes them away from planning lessons and curriculum. This question is to the Minister of Education. Who decides the structure of report cards and how often teachers have to meet with parents for IPPs, the province or the school board?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, local school authorities in Alberta are responsible for report cards. School authorities have policies related to student assessment. They're responsible for engaging parents and guardians regarding student performance. I have a mandate to look at ways of ensuring that our report cards and other grades are coherent and easily understood for Albertans. Going forward, we make our decisions based on what is best for higher achievement, what research says, and what best practices in student assessment would be.

Mrs. Leskiw: To the same minister: given that teachers are being forced to spend a large amount of time outside the classroom on administrative work, what is being done to alleviate the pressures on teachers to prevent them from spending so much time and effort on duties outside their calling as educators?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dirks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that by supporting teachers and doing whatever we can in whatever ways to address their workload issues, Alberta's students will continue to benefit from a world-class education. As part of our current agreement with teachers we're committed to a review of workload concerns, and we're in the midst of a third-party study in that regard. I look forward to continuing a productive relationship with the Alberta Teachers' Association to ensure that all students have continuing access to our high-quality education system.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm also looking forward to that report.

To the same minister. Often differing school jurisdictions such as public, Catholic, and francophone will send multiple buses to the same area. Given that finances are tight and the staffing difficulty when it comes to busing, should we be encouraging co-ordination of busing to make it more efficient?

Mr. Dirks: Well, the simple answer to that, Mr. Speaker, is yes, we should. Student transportation is a valuable part of our education system here in Alberta. We appreciate the work of school boards and our bus operators to ensure students are transported safely. We've tasked school boards to look for efficiencies in student transportation operations, including co-operative agreements with neighbouring jurisdictions, and currently two-thirds of our school boards do indeed have co-operative transportation partnerships.

2:20 **Gay-straight Alliances in Schools** (continued)

Mr. Hehr: The hon. Education minister referenced that there are all sorts of clubs that children are able to join at school – sports clubs, 4-H clubs, and the like – but we continue to hear from our LGBTQ students that they don't have a safe place to discuss issues that are important to them. To the Minister of Education: how many gay-straight alliances, not just diversity clubs, exist in our rural areas and our Catholic and private school systems?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that all of our students are provided with a

safe, caring, and respectful school environment. There are multiple – multiple – as I just mentioned, hundreds, indeed almost a thousand different clubs that exist in our schools across the province, including gay-straight alliances and antibullying initiatives and diversity clubs. These are all going to be beneficial for students right across our province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information we've received shows that gay-straight alliances are not in our rural areas, are not in our Catholic schools, and are not in our private schools. Does the Minister of Education believe there is simply no need for them in our Catholic system, in our private schools, or elsewhere in this province where they're currently not at?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in the House, our side here, our government and myself as Minister of Education, we strongly support gay-straight alliances in our schools and will continue to do so. Albertans expect and it's important that we balance the rights of students, of parents, of school boards. That's exactly what we have done and we continue to do.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Education support mandatory gay-straight alliances at every school where students request them, or is he going to continue to bow down to some argument on parental rights or nonsense like that instead of doing what's right?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. I support and our government supports ensuring that we have safe, caring environments for every student in our province. Full stop.

The Speaker: Now the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Electricity Marketing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This week TransAlta will be brought in front of the Market Surveillance Administrator to answer for a case of price-fixing that resulted from the withholding of electricity from the market in order to drive up prices. The most disturbing thing in all of this is that the practice of economic withholding is supported by this government and its predecessors to, quote, increase investment. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does the Alberta government and its regulatory authorities give a green light to power companies to create artificial shortages, driving up prices and allowing consumers to be gouged?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, actually, TransAlta is appearing before the Alberta Utilities Commission this week on an application made by the Market Surveillance Administrator. The MSA alleges certain practices on behalf of TransAlta. That's the topic of the hearing. It's a quasi-judicial process. I'm going to let that process unfold.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Hon. member, first sup.

Mr. Mason: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very nice dodge, Mr. Minister, but those rules don't apply to something before the AUC.

Given that in November 2010 TransAlta exported power from the province to create an artificial shortage and increase the price it could get for its product and given that the market was

manipulated by power corporations staging so-called discretionary shutdowns of generation during peak periods in 2010 and '11, costing consumers over \$40 million while boosting corporate profits by millions, to the minister: does the minister see a pattern of power companies . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. minister for a response.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the pattern that I see is that activities, alleged or not, are fully understood, they're public, they're discussed, and they're brought before the Alberta Utilities Commission for due process. As I said, I'm going to let that process unfold. I believe in it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that electric power is an essential service for Alberta families and businesses and given that the current deregulated system leads to price gouging, power shortages, and a power rate roller coaster, to the Minister of Energy: will he finally admit that electricity deregulation has put consumers at the mercy of big power companies and bring deregulation to an end once and for all?

Mr. Oberle: I'll admit no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The deregulated power system in Alberta has served Albertans very well. When there are issues, they're investigated and prosecuted if need be. In the meantime the member fails to acknowledge that we've had amongst the lowest power prices for the last months that we've seen for months and months. I'm confident in the system and the checks and balances in place.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

Health Facility Capital Planning

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few years ago AHS ranked the refurbishment and the replacement of long-term care facilities as their top infrastructure need. They even calculated that they would need \$140 million for new capacity and a billion to replace old facilities. In the latest AHS priority list long-term care has mysteriously dropped to seventh place, but last week the Health minister and the Seniors minister said that long-term care is their top priority. Why is it that AHS and this government can never agree on what matters?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has got us squarely agreeing on what matters here, and that's the seniors of this province and providing for them and their families. We've made some fantastic announcements here recently. Maybe the member has noticed that the Minister of Health and the Premier announced opening up about 750 beds in continuing care, including long-term care beds. We've announced that 1,500 ASLI beds are going to be opened up. At least 300 of those are long-term care beds. All that put together is a significant investment and will help us create space going forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Announcing is not opening.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election Whitecourt was promised a new hospital. AHS has not assigned a priority ranking to it except

to say that it might come in the next two to five years. Given that Beaverlodge has also been assigned the same ranking to replace its much older hospital and given that the town of Beaverlodge has even selected a site and invested in site services for the new facility, who will the minister choose? Does the chief government whip or the Transportation minister have more clout with this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, Alberta is a very robust province, has a growing population. We're spending \$19.2 billion in our current capital plan. This is a very significant investment. Of that, over \$2 billion is going to health projects specifically. We have major projects going on in places like Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. We have projects going on in Grande Prairie, in Edson, in High Prairie. Because that's what the public of Alberta deserves.

Mr. Fox: Yet they'd rather play politics than put out a prioritized list.

Mr. Speaker, given that AHS ranks the new Whitecourt hospital at the same level as the Northern Lights regional health centre redevelopment project in Fort McMurray, will the minister please tell us which of these projects is more important, the one for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education's riding or the one for the chief government whip's riding?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has been very clear. In Alberta there's one type of Albertan, there's one class of Albertan. We do not pit people against one another: urban-rural, north-south, east-west, young-old. We are making the investments for all Albertans: schools and hospitals and seniors' homes. We're doing what the people of Alberta deserve.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Chronic Disease Management

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's latest report indicates that chronic disease accounts for more than 75 per cent of the direct patient costs of Alberta's health care system. However, there's a troublesome reference in the same report that the Minister of Health currently does not have a strategy to adopt best practices in this area. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health. As a core member of the Alberta under new management team will you champion a comprehensive chronic disease management strategy to make a difference?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Health.

2:30

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chronic disease is a major priority for this government. One of the important ways to deal with some of the challenges these people face is through the PCNs, our primary care networks. It's this group of people who can work with the chronic care individual in order to give them the kind of support they need within their home and within their facilities, and we really believe that this is one step. Another step, as the Auditor General said, is about dealing with a better record system. I really think we need to make some investments into a better record system in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that the same report referenced a local best practice, which happens to be in my Calgary-Hawkwood constituency, called Crowfoot Village Family Practice, which uses team-based care, shared electronic records, and measured health outcomes, will you promote this model and advance it across the whole province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the Crowfoot Village Family Practice belongs to the Calgary Foothills primary care network. We're using the best practice from this Calgary practice and all of Alberta's 42 PCNs as we move forward with the next step in their evolution. Now, PCN evolution in the coming weeks and months includes enhanced services such as extended hours and same-day or next-day patient access. The PCN network is really the answer to some of the challenges we face in the province of Alberta. We encourage people to use it.

Mr. Luan: To the same minister: given that abundant research has shown that nontraditional treatments like yoga, acupuncture, traditional Chinese herbs are effective ways of treating chronic diseases, will you consider those outside-the-box solutions as you consider strategies moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are free to use the treatment options that they choose. However, alternative services such as naturopathy, reflexology, massage therapy, and acupuncture are not covered under the Canada health insurance plan, so we have to be careful. But I have had an opportunity to speak to many of these organizations and look forward to meeting with them to talk about what they can add to the system in order to deliver the services that so many Albertans need. Many of the services they supply are really of great value. We look forward to meeting with them.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is regarding bureaucratic bungling by the Alberta immigrant nominee program regarding a rural doctor in Drumheller-Stettler. Dr. Walters is a long-time resident of Hanna, but thanks to bureaucrats at the Alberta immigrant nominee program, that may no longer be the case after they decided to revoke his status because of a bureaucratic snafu. We need Dr. Walters as a rural physician, and Albertans need more rural physicians. Will the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour intervene and fix this immediately?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, there was no snafu. The staff there have been diligent on this file and are making decisions both in the best interests of Albertans but consistent with the program that we have available. We'll continue to do that. Immigration is important. Getting doctors into Alberta is

important, and we'll continue to work hard on that very important issue.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that provincial bureaucrats have now taken away the rights of a desperately needed rural doctor to practise medicine here in Alberta, will the minister overturn this so-called final decision, add an appeal process, and get Dr. Walters back to serving patients across rural Alberta, a job he has been doing for nine years?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, on this particular file there are some rules. The good doctor I think identified at some point that he was a resident of British Columbia rather than Alberta. I don't know what the background is on that. But it certainly makes it more complicated for us to approve him as an Alberta resident when the person has self-identified as living somewhere else. If the hon. member has different information than that, I would invite him to bring it forward.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will forward that information.

Given that the director of operations at AHS has expressed a deep concern about the possibility of losing a doctor who has served rural communities for almost a decade and given the desperation of rural communities to retain and recruit these doctors, will the Minister for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour agree to immediately fix this bureaucracy-made injustice and reinstate Dr. Walters' AINP status so he can go back to practising in rural Alberta?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I understand that rural Alberta and all of Alberta needs more doctors, and we are doing everything that we can. But the one thing about it is that if somebody wants to be recognized as an Alberta immigrant, they actually have to identify as living in Alberta. As I said in my previous answer, I would be happy to take this up with the hon. member and see if we can get to the bottom of this, and obviously if there's any . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Hunting Regulation Enforcement

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky we're having an increasing number of complaints from property owners where hunters are driving by, shooting animals on private property, and then trespassing to retrieve their trophies. To the Minister of Justice: what are you doing to make sure that regulations in these areas are being followed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our fish and wildlife offices are very active. In fact, there are roughly 40,000 enforcement-related actions through this level of law enforcement. That being said, just like any other level of law enforcement, a lot of it is largely complaint driven, and if this member or anybody else sees something going on, I encourage them to call the 24-hour Report a Poacher line at 1.800.642.3800.

Mr. McDonald: Well, again to the same minister: when is your ministry going to increase the penalties for these indiscretions? I do believe that these are being reported, and I think the penalties need to be severe enough that, you know, there is action taken.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. This is a matter that we do take seriously at Alberta Justice. Currently the violation that this member talks about has a \$50,000 fine and/or a one-year jail term. That's a one-year jail term even just for a first offence. We are not currently looking at increasing these penalties, but I would not rule out that possibility sometime in the future.

Mr. McDonald: Just to the same minister: we are still continuing to hear about not enough members in our communities, so does the minister have any priorities as to hiring to make sure that we're populating rural areas with officers?

The Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. So far this year we've hired an additional 11 fish and wildlife officers, and there's additional recruitment under way to hire an additional 10 fish and wildlife officers. This is something we do take very seriously, and I thank the member for his inquiry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Stony Plain.

Supports for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Jeneroux: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. We can all appreciate the strain that college and university can put on students. As such, mental health is a prevalent concern on postsecondary campuses. A Stats Canada report found suicide to be the ninth-leading cause of death for all Canadians, but that figure brought it to a disturbing second-leading cause of death for Canadians of postsecondary age. Given that the three-year commitment to supporting mental health in postsecondary institutions will be up soon, are there future plans to introduce a standard across postsecondary institutions for mental health strategies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for being such a passionate advocate for Alberta's postsecondary students. The funding that the member speaks of is a \$12 million commitment over three years, and it's a very important issue. It's something that I've been talking to students all across Alberta about. They have confirmed what the member has said, that they want to see more and expanded mental health services. I will be working going forward with the Minister of Health to develop a long-term strategy.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: That sounds like great news.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that closer to home 5,000 Alberta students were interviewed last year and that it was revealed that a staggering 8 per cent had considered suicide and that in a 2011 survey over 460 students at the U of A alone said that they attempted suicide the previous year, what is being done to reach out to these students proactively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Scott: Thank you again. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Students' Executive Council received \$2 million over three years to provide education and preventative outreach. Some examples of the programs include mentorship programs at the University of Lethbridge, stress-free zones at NAIT to give students a break, a Mad Hatter's Tea Party at Keyano College to reduce the stigma of mental illness. While we know efforts have reached more than 60,000 students across Campus Alberta, we know more work needs to be done, and I'm committed to doing it.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the associate minister of persons with disabilities: what is your ministry doing to help students with disabilities access services like these, that they need, within our postsecondary institutions?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this government is focused on ensuring that Albertans have the best quality of life, and education is one of the key ingredients for that. Our inclusive postsecondary education program with disabilities: we have 97 students in 18 of our postsecondary institutions right across this province. The graduates from these programs are having great success at finding jobs, and this program is doing exactly what it's intended to do.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Shingles Immunization

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors in my constituency of Stony Plain have raised concerns regarding health services. More specifically, a number of constituents are concerned about the varicella zoster virus that causes shingles and the cost to get vaccinated. To the Minister of Health: why are the shingles vaccinations not covered for seniors when the cost of vaccination is so low compared to in-patient hospital treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I want to echo my colleague in expressing concern for those who contract the shingles virus. I know my colleague to my left and myself both got the vaccine. We know it's an incredibly painful and difficult disease. We know that the rates for shingles increases with age, and for the general population we see fewer than 5 cases out of 100,000 people. For people between the ages of 80 and 84 we see 13 cases for every 1,000 people. So it's a vaccine that we believe will not be effective across . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is there any way the cost of shingles vaccinations could be reduced for low-income groups such as seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will do all we can to make sure that those who are in need of vaccinations will get them. It's important that Albertans have access to the health care they need, and we will ensure they get that.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: would the ministry consider, at least, waiving the fees for shingles vaccinations if it leads to reduced hospital costs?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we have an immunization committee. They do not recommend waiving the fees or that it be publicly funded. You know, it's one of those things. We can cover everything in the world, but sometimes we have to draw a line. This is where we did.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The continuation shall ensue now of Members' Statements, two minutes each, starting with Red Deer-North, followed by Banff-Cochrane.

Michener Centre

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, on September 19, 2014, our Premier announced his decision to keep Michener Centre in Red Deer open. When he announced his decision to the world at a press conference, he received a standing ovation. On that day our Premier touched the hearts of the residents, the families, and many of the citizens of Red Deer and Alberta. I can't begin to express the thanks and the appreciation of those positively affected by this decision.

The first time I walked into Michener Centre over 30 years ago to take my young children swimming at the rec centre, I was surprised by the people who acted differently and who would walk right up to you and say in a very innocent way, "Hi." It didn't take too long for us to learn that Michener was the home of people with developmental disabilities and that, like the rest of us, they just wanted to say hi and have a little chat. Over the years I became friends with some of the residents. Little did I know that one day I would become their MLA and represent them in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Michener has undergone many changes since it first opened over 100 years ago as the Alberta Ladies' College, considered to be one of western Canada's finest residential colleges at the time. In 1916 the provincial government converted the college into a psychiatric hospital for physically and mentally wounded soldiers suffering from what was then called shell shock. Today we call it posttraumatic stress disorder. It was in 1923 that it became the provincial training school for people with mental disabilities. Today it functions as Michener Services, a residential care facility for persons with development disabilities.

Although Michener went through some controversial times and there are those who dislike Michener because it is considered an institution, Michener is an award-winning facility that provides excellent care for its residents. In fact, it's more than that. It's a well-loved home, a home for almost 50 years for some and a home where the residents are cared for and loved and where they want to live for the rest of their lives.

To these residents and their families, who have chosen to be with Michener: rest assured that the promise made to you in 2008 and in 2014 . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Major Sporting Events in Alberta

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The eyes of Canada and the world have been on Alberta, watching as our province plays host to one world-class sport event after another.

In 2014 Alberta hosted events like the under-20 FIFA Women's World Cup and the ITU world grand finals. This weekend Lake Louise hosted the Alpine Ski World Cup, where Alberta's own Jan Hudec had a very exciting run in the super-G event, finishing ninth overall. On Wednesday the Canada Cup of Curling begins in Camrose, and even now the excitement is building in Red Deer as they are preparing to host the 2019 Canada Winter Games.

And 2015 is shaping up to be as impressive, with the FIFA Women's World Cup, the Tim Hortons Brier, the 2015 Track and Field Championships, the International Biathlon Union cup races, and so much more ready to go.

Through these major sporting events we are putting Alberta at the centre stage of sports, and the benefits of this attention are felt across the province. Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian tourism industry, with domestic travellers spending about \$3.6 billion a year. Perhaps more importantly, our continued presence as a world-class event host contributes to a more vibrant and healthy way of life for Albertans. Hosting both small and large events can inspire generations of Albertans to fall in love with recreation and sport, and that love can lead to more active Albertans through participation, planning, volunteering, or just spectating.

Mr. Speaker, when you take our legacy of hosting successful sporting events at our world-class facilities and venues, our strong volunteer base, and the number of attractive destinations as a backdrop, the undeniable conclusion is that Alberta is a perfect place to host any major sporting event, and I hope we can do so into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw to the House's attention a historic event that occurred just over a year ago, on November 27, 2013. On that day an agreement was signed between the province of Alberta and the Tsuu T'ina Nation to allow for the completion of the Calgary ring road network.

Now, this was not an overnight success story. In fact, it was in 1955 that the provincial highways minister first suggested a southwest bypass be planned for Calgary, and in 1956 the roadway first appeared on planning documents prepared by the city.

Mr. Speaker, the completion of the southwest Calgary ring road has been the most important concern of my constituents from before I was elected and continues today. I want to acknowledge their efforts and hard work in learning about and expressing their observations about the project and its impact on their

neighbourhoods. As their MLA I've learned about cut and fill bridge design, how to review hydrologists' reports, how paving materials have an impact on the traffic noise levels, and much more.

The southwest Calgary ring road is an important project for both the province and the city of Calgary. Once open, the roadway will also provide relief to urban freeways and feeder roads that are already under stress within the region. This highway will change traffic patterns in Calgary-Glenmore and neighbouring constituencies. I will continue to work with all involved to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, it took a lot of hard work and determination to achieve the agreement signed last year. I would like to thank the Tsuu T'ina Nation for their willingness to partner with the government of Alberta on this project. I honour their historic decision. Also to my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Hays and the former Member for Calgary-Elbow: thank you. To the Minister of Transportation, his office, and his department: your willingness to answer and address the numerous questions of my constituents has been excellent and is greatly appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Hehr: December 3 is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. There are 1 billion people living in the world with some form of disability. Around the globe persons with disabilities not only face physical barriers but also social, economic, and attitudinal barriers. Furthermore, disabilities are associated with 20 per cent of global poverty.

Mr. Speaker, we have work to do right here in Alberta. Oftentimes to be disabled in this province means you are most likely to be poor; you will face barriers to find affordable, accessible housing; you will have lessened opportunities in the workforce; and you may not get the support you need to go to school.

StatsCan notes that at any time 50 per cent of the people who receive Alberta Works benefits are likely to have some form of disability. Alberta has the lowest monetary support for individuals who find themselves in the difficult position of being unemployed. There was some talk from this government of actually investigating why Alberta has the lowest supports in the land when it comes to giving people a hand up when they're unable to find work, but despite this rhetoric, we've seen no movement.

2:50

That being said, we do have many reasons to celebrate. Albertans with disabilities, despite the institutional barriers, are struggling against all odds to create change. Take the MoMo Dance Theatre, a group of disabled Albertans who are changing the cultural landscape by incorporating all forms of disabilities into a vibrant dance ensemble that everyone enjoys. Organizations like the Champions Career Centre are working hard to find Albertans with disabilities opportunities in the workforce. Citizens like Nabeel Ramji are organizing the disabled community around accessibility issues and educating the public and government on the concept of visitability, making every structure barrier free.

On a final note, Mr. Speaker, in my view, it's time for Alberta to strike out a bold path on truly getting serious about eliminating barriers. We have to look at inaccessibility and inequality, work

opportunities and social engagement, and how to get our citizens with disabilities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Denis: I'm providing oral notice for three government motions.

Motion 11.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time any question necessary for the disposal of the bill at that stage shall be put forthwith.

Second, Government Motion 12.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time each question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Finally, Motion 13.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, is resumed, not more than two hours shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time each question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Bill 9

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

The bill before you today is built upon the over 50 amendments to the act originally introduced in May 2014 through Bill 13. It reflects the considerable feedback we have received from a very diverse range of stakeholders, including owners, developers, condo board members, condo managers, and legal experts in the condominium industry. Amendments include improved transparency and accountability for boards and developers, enhanced inspection and enforcement sections, rules respecting the regulation of condominium managers, and the legislative framework for a new tribunal system whose focus will be to hear and settle a variety of condominium disputes.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a significant step forward to ensure Albertans that condominium legislation is modernized and effective. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 10
An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights
to Protect our Children

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children.

This legislation makes amendments to the Alberta Bill of Rights, the Alberta Human Rights Act, the Education Act, and the School Act. This legislation supports the government's zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying, which is unacceptable. It is unacceptable whether it's related to sexual orientation, race, religion, or any other factor. It also ensures parents' rights are respected, enshrining them into the Alberta Bill of Rights. With this legislation students will have a clear recourse should their request to establish antidiscrimination clubs, including gay-straight alliances, be denied. This bill also proposes a package of tough and thorough antibullying provisions. With this legislation, Mr. Speaker, we are advancing the rights of the LGBTQ community, protecting children, and respecting the roles of parents and school boards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 75 I move that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children, be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, just before we go on with this, noting how close we are to 3 o'clock, let me recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Yes. I'd like to waive rule 7(7) so we can continue this past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Let us move on.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the Asia Advisory Council annual report 2013-14. I've had the distinct honour of chairing the council since my appointment in June of 2012, and I've been extremely fortunate to work alongside talented and dedicated Albertans who are passionate about enhancing Alberta's connections with the Asia Pacific regions. The document that I am tabling today shares how the council has been gathering information and consulting with stakeholders to explore ways to improve relations between Alberta and Asia. Here are the five reports for the tabling.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of letters of support that the government has received for Bill 7, the Chartered Professional

Accountants Act, from the three currently existing accounting bodies: the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta, the Certified Management Accountants Association of Alberta, and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta. I am pleased to note that the government has received support from all of these associations for Bill 7.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Given that unanimous consent was not given, I am going to take the last 30 seconds to do two important tablings myself, the first of which is five copies of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta's 2013-14 annual report pursuant to section 63(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Thank you.

The second is five copies of a memo dated November 27, 2014, from the Government House Leader to the Speaker, which was referenced in my statement earlier today, and it outlines an agreement that has been reached between the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader regarding the Oral Question Period rotation since it is only those two caucuses who are affected by that regulation.

Noting that it is now 3 p.m., we shall move on. There were no points of order, just for the record, so we can go on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201

Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing)
Amendment Act, 2014

[Debate adjourned November 24: Mr. Mason speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have seven minutes left should you wish to take it. If not, we will move on.

I have the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Calgary-Glenmore.

3:00

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014.

Mr. McAllister: Easy for you to say.

Mr. Hale: Easy for me to say. Not quite so.

Quite often in my constituency one of the major concerns I get is on electricity bills. The cost of electricity is a huge issue. There are many, many low-income seniors that are having trouble with the costs that we see. I do feel in reading this bill – and I look forward to the member's comments on closing second reading – that it is important that these bills are more understandable, and I think this goes a ways in helping that.

One of the issues he is trying to fix in this is when we talk about the regulated rate option. Now, when you think of regulations, you think those are fixed costs, but they're not. I think there is some confusion that if you don't take the regulated rate and you sign a contract, those costs are fixed, but in the regulated rate it's the default. So you get whatever the market is in that time frame. His choice to change it to a variable market rate, I think, is a step in the right direction. It shows that if you don't sign a fixed contract,

if you go to the regulated rate, which is the default option, then you get charged the rate at the time. And those will fluctuate. I think a lot of people that hear “regulated rate option” think that, you know, they’re fixed, that that’s what they’re going to be charged. Then when they get their bill, it is confusing.

One of the concerns I do have with this bill is that when we list out all the charges that are going to be incurred on these bills, it’s going to cause more confusion because in transmission there’s a variable cost, which fluctuates, plus there’s a fixed cost, that stays the same. So from one bill to the next your transmission costs are going to fluctuate a bit in that variable section of it. Distribution also has a variable rate and a fixed rate, so from bill to bill the variable rate has a possibility of fluctuating. Also, the taxes on that bill are going to be different because of your consumption rate of electricity, the more you consume or the less you consume. It’s going to affect your taxes. Also, in some cities there are consent and access fees. Those may be different.

So when we want the bills to all look the same, they’re not all going to look the same because there are different charges on the bills. I think the theory behind Bill 201 is correct in making them easier to understand, but in this process I’m not so sure that they’re going to be easier to understand. There might be lines and lines and lines of numbers that will be confusing to some people.

Mr. McAllister: Like the new math?

Mr. Hale: Kind of like the new math. Yes, hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Citation?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Yes. Mr. Speaker, 23(b), questions under discussion here. We’re not talking about the Education Act or education; we’re talking about billing. So if you could direct the member to the subject of billing and the transparency of billing, I would appreciate that.

The Speaker: Thank you. It’s a point of relevance then, is it?

Mr. Anderson: I would just like to note the unbelievable irony of this member pointing out that we need to stay on point and remain relevant to the subject matter of the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Hi. I was listening to the member, and he was talking about billing, so I don’t quite understand why there is a protest from the sponsoring member. But I would like to hear the rest of what the particular member is talking about.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I was actually sending a note around to a few people to just trim down the noise because I was having a little trouble hearing him. But I didn’t see anything totally out of order.

So why don’t you continue on, hon. member, and note the concerns that have been expressed?

Debate Continued

Mr. Hale: We were just talking about the addition of all the different lines on the power bills, so I’m just going to carry on. I’m just going to carry on. I am speaking in favour of the member’s bill, so I’m not sure why he would want to stop me when I’m actually supporting what he’s put forward.

As I continue on talking about the lines on the bills, it’s going to come down to the AUC and working with the minister to figure out what to put on these bills, how to make them look the same. You know, that might be quite a bit to ask. Are we now going to be telling companies what they can print and what they can’t print and how they have to run their business? That is a bit of concern to me.

You know, when we are talking about transmission and the costs associated – I’ve been meeting with quite a few of the companies – we’ve heard lots in the last few years about the Bill 50 power lines and the transmission and the transmission costs that are going to be passed on to the consumer. I was actually happy to hear that there’s one projected line up north that they’re taking bids on, and that will be a one-time bid. In saying that, I mean that when the company puts the bid in, that’s what they’re going to get paid. I think that’s been a huge problem with the lines we’ve seen being constructed in the province, that there are no cost-control measures put in there. I’ve mentioned that to some of the transmission companies.

I think there need to be some measures put in place so that the costs stay within. We realize that there’s going to be some fluctuation, but to see some of the huge charges to the province and to the ratepayers on these lines, you know, billions of dollars extra – every company wants to make money. That’s what makes the world go around. But we have to be diligent, and we have to ensure that when we’re giving the authority to someone to charge ratepayers, they walk within a certain bounds. To not have any measurement in place is not good. I think we definitely need to see some cost control in these contracts, and we need to ensure that there are needs assessments done.

The AUC and AESO. I mean, when they’re making these decisions where these power lines go now that the government has taken that power away from themselves – you know, I think it was Bill 8 that they passed a while ago saying that cabinet can’t make those decisions. That was a good step. We need to leave it to the experts.

One of the questions I asked last week was on the cogeneration lines up north. We see in my area especially, the constituency of Strathmore-Brooks, and heading into Cypress-Medicine Hat that there are massive power lines. I actually had a meeting with the Property Rights Advocate last year, and one of the questions he asked me was if I was still getting concerns over these power lines that are getting built. My answer was that I’m still receiving huge concerns. People are upset that we have these huge lines. I’m not saying that lines aren’t needed.

Mr. Anglin: Point of order again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Citation, please?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Standing Order 23(b). Mr. Speaker, again it goes to relevance. We’re not talking about property rights here. We’re not talking about Bill 50 and transmission lines. We’re talking about transparency in billing. If the member could keep his statements to

transparency in billing, particularly when it comes to things like cogeneration, which is a ridiculous argument. The cogeneration is already connected to the transmission grid. I'm not sure what that does to transparency in billing. So that is my objection.

3:10

Mr. Anderson: Well, I duly note the member's commitment to keeping discussion relevant in this Chamber. That's fantastic. I think that the subject matter that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has been dealing with so far actually is relevant to the bill. In order to understand this bill and understand why it's needed or not needed, you kind of have to understand some of the facts surrounding the electricity industry and the transmission industry, so I think that it is relevant.

I would also ask, Mr. Speaker, if I could get a point of clarification. Are these points of order that are being called in any way taking away from the time that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has? He's being interrupted. I'm assuming not. You know, hopefully, he can get through the rest of his remarks without being interrupted on such grounds.

The Speaker: Quickly on the point of order and the question you raise for clarification, please note that when a point of order starts, the clock stops. The member will get his full time.

I'm going to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Page 438 of the 24th edition, 2011, of *Erskine May* points out there under relevance in debate, "The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible." It is expected that the person would have enough time to develop the argument before you could be calling them on relevance merely because they mentioned another topic in the sense of a sentence.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: What page number was that, hon. member? I just missed it. Did you close it?

Ms Blakeman: Page 438.

The Speaker: Page 438. Thank you.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to weigh in here. I recognize that relevance is not particularly clear always and that a person may need to venture afield in order to make an argument. At least the member, I guess, has confined his remarks to the electrical system, which is encouraging.

But I would argue under (j) and (k) that if a member does venture afield that he should at least be factual in doing so; otherwise, it builds the base for an incorrect argument. In this case to talk about the fact that we have a transmission system build that has, in the member's words, absolutely no cost oversight is factually incorrect, and it's not helpful to the debate in here and is likely to create some disorder if he persists in the argument. It's not true. There is a cost oversight management system. There are rate hearings that determine which costs are allowable and which ones aren't. There is cost oversight, and that's a simple fact.

I would argue that it's probably best to build our argument going forward based upon fact, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, the point of order is on you. Just let me hear your argument briefly.

Mr. Hale: Yeah. I'm going to speak to the hon. minister's comments about this point of order. When there is a cost overrun on these transmission lines – and there is a cost overrun on the lines – that goes to the AESO. The AESO says: okay; there's a cost overrun. They take it to the AUC to get it approved, and the AUC generally approves the cost overrun.

So I don't know. I would have actually liked – you know, the minister and I could meet after and talk about this, but if he could show me any areas where any of these cost overruns were denied by the AESO or AUC, I would actually appreciate that. Then I would make some corrections in my statements. But from what I know, from what I've seen, and from what I've read and learned, any of the cost overruns are automatically approved. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Perhaps you could follow that up on your own time with the Minister of Energy. In the meantime let me just say, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, that I did find you straying a little bit from the main subject, but you were clever in bringing it back and being relevant, so I didn't see a need to intervene. However, this is the second reminder, so please refresh your memory on what it is that you really want to say about this particular bill, and let us move on.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hale: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be very clever right now, and I'm going to talk about transmission lines. I'm going to talk about cogeneration. I'm going to talk about the costs of transmissions lines. I'm going to talk about generation. And it all comes down to what's on your power bill. Every one of those points is included on your power bill. That is what the member wants to have listed line by line for the people to see. I'm speaking about the costs, which will be on these power bills. Hopefully, I can deter the member from bringing up any more points of order on my roundabout talks on his bill.

I was speaking about the costs that are projected on our bills and how they want to be broken down. I was speaking about the power lines in my area and the costs of those power lines. I've met with many companies up in Fort McMurray who are going to be looking at doing expansions, and they want to put in cogeneration. They want to put in their boiler units that will, you know, in turn provide electricity for the province. It's great. It lowers carbon emissions, it helps reach our goal of what we want to get, but the infrastructure isn't there. They need the assurance that the infrastructure is going to be there, and that infrastructure costs money. There have been some questions: where do we build it?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I show the following three speakers: Calgary-Glenmore, followed by Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Let us start with Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 201, Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for his work in bringing this bill forward on behalf of his constituents and all Albertans.

The Alberta Utilities Commission regulates the utilities sector to ensure that Albertans receive safe and reliable service at reasonable rates. Bill 201 would ask the AUC to provide a report on two things: first, transparency in billing, and second, the format of bills sent to customers. The AUC would also be asked to consider "replacement of the term 'regulated rate' with 'variable

market rate.’” Bill 201 would then compel the minister to implement the recommendations put forward by the AUC within six months from the day the report is provided or take the steps necessary to implement these recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, let us remember that the AUC has many roles, including establishing mandatory requirements and standards of practice for the retail electric and natural gas markets. This is accomplished with procedures involving a consultative process with stakeholders and interested parties. In summary, the AUC makes certain that Alberta’s utility providers provide a fair and high-quality service to Alberta’s public. A part of providing a quality service is ensuring that consumers understand clearly how they are being charged. The government of Alberta has provided Albertans with tools to help understand their utility bills, and our government remains committed to a high level of transparency in billing.

Mr. Speaker, utility bills contain a lot of information. In fact, my household bill is four pages long. A Calgary residential energy and utility statement has several lines in the electricity section alone, detailing the energy charge, the administration charge, the delivery charge, the distribution charge, the transmission charge, the balancing pool allocation, rate riders, and the local access fee. In the case of Calgary Enmax customers there’s even more information on the bill, with the water, the waste-water and drainage, the waste and recycling billing sections.

So, Mr. Speaker, in our quest to assist Albertans, are there other models out there? We can consider the federal government, which has legislation that directs regulatory authorities to clearly explain aspects of bills to their consumers. Section 4 of the User Fees Act states that regulatory authorities must “explain to clients clearly how the user fee is determined and identify the cost and revenue elements of the user fee.” This must be done before a regulating authority can expand the application of fixes or increases. They must “take reasonable measures to notify clients, and other regulating authorities with a similar clientele of the user fee proposed to be fixed, increased, expanded in application or increased in duration.” Federal regulatory authorities must “give all clients or service users a reasonable opportunity to provide ideas or proposals for ways to improve the services to which the user fee relates.” Furthermore, they must “establish an independent advisory panel to address a complaint submitted by a client regarding the user fee or change.” From these few regulations we can see that it is possible to have measures in place to promote transparency.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, let us return to the Alberta situation. In our legislation, bill formatting is not specifically addressed in this act. It is important that all fees be explained clearly so that Albertans can easily understand the charges and take action against false or mistaken billings. Bill 201 aims to simplify electricity bills to better assist Alberta consumers. We are proud to see a diverse and expansive deregulated market-based electricity market in Alberta and will do our best to support both producers and consumers in our province.

The language used on utility bills can be incredibly complex. We must ensure that the language is simplified whenever possible. The Alberta government has taken steps with the Electric Utilities Act. It outlines how a bill prepared for a customer must indicate the amount charged by the retailer for electric energy in dollars, the amount charged by the retailer for administration of the customer’s account, the amount paid to the owner’s distribution tariff for the account of the customer in dollars, and under the heading Local Access Fee any amount levied under section 45 of

the Municipal Government Act or schedule 1, section 21, of the Metis Settlements Act or by bylaw under the Indian Act.

The Alberta government has provided Albertans various resources located at the Ministry of Energy website that can help assist Albertans in reading their utility bills. This website helps consumers understand the administration fee, transmission charge, distribution charge, and local access fee. At energy.alberta.ca there are even more resources available to help with understanding the language of your electricity bill. There is also information on measuring usage, charges from your retailer, and charges from your distributor.

Another matter for our Legislature to consider is reviews made by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission of cellphone bills. Their reviews have brought about significant changes and provide evidence of the impact commission reviews can have on bill transparency. Alberta utility providers also hold themselves to the highest standard of integrity, and it is prudent for a commission to review processes.

Mr. Speaker, periodic reviews of an industry by a commission often lead to real and positive change. In 1983 the CRTC announced a public process to review and where appropriate revise the general regulations for four telephone companies: Bell Canada, British Columbia Telephone Company, Northwestel Inc., and Terra Nova Telecommunications. In fact, on September 8, 1983, the commission published a document entitled Review of the General Regulations of the Federally Regulated Telephone Companies discussion paper. The commission then required that single-line billing be implemented monthly and that detailed itemized billing be required at least once per year or after an install or change of service.

Mr. Speaker, the CRTC since then has taken additional steps to improve transparency in telecommunications billing. In 2002 the commission noted various policies in regards to billing frequencies amongst local exchange carriers. The CRTC then directed companies to show cause as to why they should not provide monthly itemized billing. This is an example of how a commission can regulate an industry to engage in more transparent practices.

When companies are able to hide behind complicated language or infrequent itemized billing, consumers lose. Changes to our billing processes and statements will not happen overnight, but transparency slowly gets better over time and is continuing to evolve. Bill 201 will help build upon the strategies already in motion. The province of Alberta has had a number of strategies implemented to help Albertans clearly understand their bills. However, as we have seen with the CRTC rulings, the processes are ongoing and can be improved upon. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is prepared to adapt to changing challenges. We are proud to offer unparalleled service to all Albertans.

Thank you to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for your hard work on the bill, and I look forward to supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by either Edmonton-Calder or Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to speak to this private member’s bill. I have reviewed it, and for many of the reasons given by the former speaker, I think this goes a long way to increasing our openness and transparency when it comes to electricity bills. When Albertans receive their bill in the mail, they often have a convoluted assessment of various rate charges – what programs there are, how much the electricity costs, how much the

administration costs, and the like – and we have to try and simplify the process in order that Albertans can make informed decisions about the electricity packages that they are purchasing and whether, in fact, they are getting the best value for their dollar.

If we look at the energy market and the energy that people are receiving at their homes, oftentimes, you know, we Albertans have just simply chosen to go on the regulated rate option. I've been informed that oftentimes this may not be the best choice, that people should be looking at other options like the spot energy price and those types of mechanisms that can actually reduce people's monthly bill and would allow them to save on their energy. If we look at how the bill is presented and if they get some clear direction on what energy actually costs – what they're paying and what their providers are bringing into their homes and at what price – I think that would go a long way to ensuring that Albertans are making the proper choices to get the energy that they need at a reasonable price.

So not to belabour it any further, I will be supporting the hon. member's motion. I think it goes a long way to assisting people with some clarity on their electricity bills.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments fairly brief, other than I'd like to rise and show my support for Bill 201. I think it's very important for Albertans to understand their bills. This bill, Bill 201 – I'm being redundant here – simplifies their bills and makes it a lot easier for Albertans to see exactly what fees and costs are associated with their electricity bills.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, the cost of electricity in Alberta has gone up significantly since this PC government decided to deregulate our electricity system. I think it's important for Albertans to understand where their dollars are going and how they're being applied within a bill. I find it fascinating that even if there are folks who use zero electricity in a month, they still face a significant bill. It's, you know, put under the category of either administrative fees or however else the companies decide to hide certain fees or to show fees on a bill. Providing some clarity and transparency to this, I think, is a step in the right direction.

I'm not sure if this bill goes far enough as far as protecting Albertans from gouging, from high prices of electricity, and from spikes. You know, it would've been nice to see the bill go further, but as a baby step in the right direction – I think this bill takes that, and therefore I will be supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

We're going to follow a strict rotation for this particular bill. I have Wildrose next, followed by a government member, followed by a Liberal member, followed by an ND member, if you wish. I have numerous notes and some speaking lists to abide by.

Let's move on to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

3:30

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you very much. I, too, rise in support of Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, and I commend and congratulate my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for introducing a bill that is going to improve transparency, is going to improve clarity. Our province of 4

million Albertans is continually looking for the opportunity to understand better how their \$45 billion a year of taxpayers' money is being spent, so I relish the chance to have the greater transparency.

I've heard some of the members of the House talk about how there's different taxation and, of course, generation is not regulated but distribution and transmission are, so it's going to lead to some situations where it may be a bit hard to have an actual standardized consumer utility bill that's exactly the same. I think that's why it's a good reason to give the Alberta Utilities Commission six months to have a look at this. I think it's especially important in part of the constituency I represent, Medicine Hat. Of course, Medicine Hat has its own utility department, providing tremendous low-cost utilities to the citizens of Medicine Hat for a hundred years now plus a dividend for our taxpayers and our ratepayers to, you know, have this money spent on other quality services.

The importance of transparency, the importance of an electrical system that has clarity really hit home to me about a year ago. I was looking at a bill from Montana, from Hill county in Montana. The ranch was about a township. The utility bill was \$650 for a month, and only \$35 of that was for what we call our ancillary charges. Of course, in Alberta, unfortunately, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks was alluding to, the costs of transmission, the costs of Bill 50 without a needs assessment, the costs initiated somewhere at \$16 billion possibly going to \$30 billion: these costs are going to be borne by Alberta ratepayers.

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre on a point of order. Which citation are you citing, please?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's on 23(b). It goes to the relevance. Here we are back talking Bill 50 and transmission lines and \$16 billion of infrastructure. It's got nothing to do with Bill 201 that's being brought forward today that deals with transparency in retail billing.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we've been dealing with this off and on throughout the afternoon, and I've therefore refreshed my memory with Bill 201. What we should be talking about is what Bill 201 contains: issues to do with the Alberta Utilities Commission; the Electric Utilities Act; specifically, improving transparency, the billing of customers, the format of bills, fixed and variable costs related thereto, regulated rates, variable market rates, and so on.

Perhaps, Cypress-Medicine Hat, you could bring the point around to that because I'm sure that's where you were going.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Clearly, if we're going to come up with a standardized bill that outlines the costs of electricity, the regulated rate option becoming the variable market option I think is a very, very good idea. The regulated rate option, I think, is misleading in the terminology, in the words, and makes people think that, in fact, electric generation is regulated when we all know it is the element of Alberta's electric system

that's not. So calling it a variable market rate will go some distance.

Mr. Speaker, my point when it comes to the transmission lines was, again, around a standardized bill. Let's fully outline these costs. Let's fully outline these costs for all Alberta ratepayers, for all 4 million Albertans, as to what the costs of our electrical system are. I heard it argued here on a point of clarification and a point of order that there was a cost oversight process and there wasn't a cost oversight process. Well, my goodness. What better way to get Albertans involved than to put it on their bill or at least to give them the option of seeing where their hard-earned tax dollars are going.

So I would suggest to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that possibly we look at how this \$16 billion to \$30 billion of transmission lines that our government is forcing onto the ratepayers of Alberta – let's put it on the bill, too. Let's look at a situation where it's clear as to what we're all paying for, and Albertans can decide on their own if it's worth the value.

Again, back to the bill in Hill county out of Montana. It was absolutely clear that only \$35 of this was ancillary charges, and the rest of it was absolutely clear as to where the fees were, the usage, the cost. Instead of the case in Alberta, where if you have \$600 of electric, you're going to have at least \$600 of ancillary charges, it was nice to see, first of all, a jurisdiction that honours, you know, low-cost, competitive, stable electric prices to build their ranching and their irrigated industries and the fact that the bill was so nice and clear. Electricity is an important element in industry, in agriculture. We do exist in a competitive world. We compete with our neighbouring provinces. We compete with our neighbouring states.

Again, back to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the idea to have a bill that's more standardized, that has a lot more clarity, that's more transparent will go a long, long way to help Albertans understand what they're paying for, will go a long, long way to help Albertans understand if their government is making the right decision for them.

It was interesting. In one of the debates that I had back before the election, members in the crowd actually brought up that on their bills they'd like to see an understanding of why they were hearing stories about how suppliers of products and men and equipment and commodities on the transmission lines – they were hearing this rumour that they were actually being asked to increase their bills, that their bills were too low. They were hearing stories that sometimes trucks were hauling gravel 300 miles or more when gravel was available a lot closer. One of the defining moments for me in that debate was when the PC MLA admitted that there wasn't a competitive bid process for the Bill 50 transmission lines, spending \$16 billion. That was incredible.

Again, I like what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is doing here. I support the bill and the idea that we can have a standardized bill or at least the option of a standardized bill with a lot more clarity. Be interesting to see in the next six months what the Alberta Utilities Commission comes up with that can make this, you know, work for everybody.

In Medicine Hat, again, it's an interesting situation, owning our own utility company down there. I always kind of wondered if we were subject to the ancillary charges that go with the Bill 50 lines. I'm told that initially we weren't, before only a small portion, and now we're going to be subject to them to give us the opportunity to sell into the grid. I'm thinking of the 61,000 people in Medicine Hat, the 17,000 or 18,000 that I represent. My goodness. Wouldn't it be great to have that amount on the bill so that they could clearly see if the elected officials in Alberta, if the elected officials in Medicine Hat have made the right decision for them to do this?

Electricity. It's crucial that a province like Alberta has stable, predictable electric costs to grow our agriculture, to grow our industry. As we saw in the uproar over the modular schools being moved from seven to one and the push-back that that has caused, the unfairness in the by-election and the unfairness of not having their priority list . . .

Mr. Anglin: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have a point of order again?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Anglin: Again, Mr. Speaker, 23(b). Here we are talking about modular schools. It's not in the bill. I mean, I know what's going on. I just would like it, if they're going to speak to the bill, that they speak to the topic of the bill. I'm not against any leeway or flexibility that you might provide. But, clearly, speaking to schools, modular schools, and the funding of modular schools is just not part of this private member's bill.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would agree with you to a point.

Now, Cypress-Medicine Hat, unless you're using these other external points to make a point relative to the bill, I would ask you to please refrain from straying too far away here.

3:40

We do allow considerable liberties in this House, but this is the fourth point of order already, so let's get on with the proper debate on this. I don't want to hear any more points of order, and I don't want to hear any more arguments right now. Let's just finish off. Let the member finish off his point, please. If it's necessary, then I'll come back to Strathmore-Brooks who wants to speak, I'll come back to the Deputy Government House Leader who wants to speak, and others. But in the meantime let's narrow this down to the bill itself, please, or I'll be the next one interfering.

Debate Continued

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is where I was headed, to narrow it down. I swear. [interjections] Yeah, and it's just wasting my time.

In the two and a half years since I've been elected, I've had at least 20 or 30 people, mostly seniors, walk in with their utility bills in their hands and say: "I can't understand this, but I can understand that I can't afford it. Please help me." So, again, I like what the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is doing. This will go a long way.

My point with the schools was that when I opened up the *Edmonton Journal* a week ago, two letters to the editor were clearly – they wanted to know why the priority jumped from seven to one. It's Albertans wanting to know what we're paying for. It's Albertans wanting to be more involved in our system.

When you look at only 28 per cent voting sometimes, it makes you wonder why. And, guys, maybe this is the reason why. Not having a clear, transparent utility bill with clarity, maybe it's driving business away. Maybe it's driving people away from moving to our great province. We know we're at a disadvantage already in some respects when we don't have the cheap hydro that other provinces have. It's important, I believe – one thing about Albertans is 4 million intelligent, educated people, and I think the more information that we can provide them on a clear, transparent basis will go a long, long way to their involvement in our process, whether it's electricity or government or voting. It will go a long,

long way in our process as to how we spend their hard-earned tax dollars. It seems like we forget that so easily.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm going to go to Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Fenske: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is an honour to be able to rise today in debate for Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, I'd like to personally thank the hon. member for bringing forward this bill because by doing so, he is encouraging the House to consider the matter of electrical utilities billing, something of wide-ranging interest. Indeed, this topic is important for Albertans across this great province. Homeowners and renters alike pay electricity bills, so I'm sure interest on this bill, as I said, is very widespread.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on to the bill specifically. Bill 201 is intended to call on the Alberta Utilities Commission to draft and put forward a report on billing transparency. This report would be submitted to the Minister of Energy. Furthermore, it would contain a proposal for a standardized bill for utility customers.

Now, I listened as my counterpart the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore was going through her bill. She lives, of course, in an urban area. I have, I would say, the great advantage of being a member of an REA, a rural electrification association. In looking at her bill, she cited it is four pages. My bill, of course, is just one page double sided. So I know that there is a discrepancy throughout the province with respect to how people have their bills presented.

The new proposed bill format would list all variable and fixed costs. So upon receiving this proposal, the minister would then implement the commission's recommendations, and this would occur within six months from the date on which the report is provided.

In addition, the minister could also introduce amendments in the Legislative Assembly here on the process of implementing those particular recommendations.

Finally, the commission would implement the standardized bill as initially proposed in its report to the minister. This is, of course, the essence of Bill 201, Mr. Speaker. I applaud this member for representing the interests of Albertans in trying to ensure that their utility bills are presented as clearly as possible because if we can clearly understand, it certainly helps us as a more educated consumer to make some decisions on our part. And, happily, this government also has an initiative in place to ensure that Albertans are able to read their utility bills accurately. So we're all on the same page here.

The commission regulates the utilities sector, including the markets for natural gas and electricity. Its aim is to look out for Alberta's economic, environmental, and social interests in order to cover any gaps left open by the forces of the competitive market, which, of course, we've been discussing here, that some of my colleagues earlier this afternoon have been bringing forward. It is the commission that is responsible for establishing mandatory requirements and best standards of practice for retail natural gas and electricity markets. By engaging in a consultative process with stakeholders, the commission sets practices that reflect the interests of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to note that existing legislation also pertains to how these bills are reported. The billing regulation

from 2003 under the Electric Utilities Act has a direct bearing on this. Section 4 of the act states: "A bill prepared by a retailer" – and we are talking about the retail electrical market – "or an owner for a customer must indicate separately" four different sets or types of charges. Now, these four categories of charges are:

- (i) the amount charged by the retailer for electric energy, [given] in dollars;
- (ii) the amount charged by the retailer for administration of the customer's account;
- (iii) the amount paid to the owner under the owner's distribution tariff for the account of the customer [again given] in dollars;
- (iv) under the heading "local access fee" any amount levied under section 45 of the Municipal Government Act . . .

I believe that my colleague from Calgary-Glenmore also brought that up.

. . . or Schedule 1, section 21 of the Metis Settlements Act or by bylaw under the [federal] Indian Act.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then clause (b) of section 4 requires that the customer's bill

- (b) include the customer's site identification number or numbers as specified in the ISO Rules for load settlement, but if the retailer and customer agree, the site identification number or numbers may be provided in electronic format to the customer when the bill is sent . . .
- (c) specify the customer's consumption of electric energy . . .
- (d) specify the period for which each of the amounts referred to in clause (a) is calculated, and [finally]
- (e) indicate the name and telephone number of the owner, or a person authorized by the owner to act on its behalf, to answer customer inquiries about distribution access service.

Thus, we see in the original legislation that there are stringent requirements governing how information on these bills must be reported to customers.

We have since taken measures to strengthen this. In the interests of electricity consumers the government undertook an effort in 2013 to reduce the volatility of electricity prices from one month to another.

I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have a copy of one of my electrical bills here, that I was going to table earlier today, but I certainly will table it tomorrow. We, of course, had to make a decision on how we wanted to have our bill, if we were going to just be on a demand or if we were going to go for a contract. So we as a family sat down and made some decisions, and we think that we have a very reasonable contract of 8 cents a kilowatt hour. I see on this particular bill that if people were not on a contract for September – this is an October bill, by the way, so this was for energy consumed in September. If you were not on a contract under my REA, your RRO rate for September would have been .0882 per kilowatt hour. So I would say that we made a very good decision in choosing to go on a contract.

3:50

I know that with the family business that we had when this all rolled out and people were looking at contract prices, we were a little leery at first. I have to say that that's a decision that was made with a great deal of thought, and we accepted a contract. So now as farm customers – I guess that's what we would be – we have been on a contract for at least two years, maybe even longer. Time seems to fly. Anyhow, that helps reduce our volatility from one month to another.

This was done with an aim of empowering consumers to make more informed retail choices. While not bearing directly on the reporting format for customers' bills, these measures did improve predictability and helped to minimize surprises for Albertans paying their utility bills.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that this government has endeavoured to assist Albertans in understanding the contents of their bill. In particular, the Ministry of Energy has made resources available online in order to make this as clear as possible for anyone who may be unclear about the information on their bill. Information from this online guide covers a number of categories about which people may have questions. It tells you that your energy fee is based on the rate you are charged in cents per kilowatt hour multiplied by the amount of electricity used. The rate you are charged is either the default or regulated rate, which you have agreed to with your retail supplier, which I explained just a little earlier. The regulated rate is calculated in advance for each month and is approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission.

It also explains the administration fee to customers. As the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre explained, that is part of what he wants to make absolutely clear. This fee is charged by your electricity retailer to cover the costs of billing and other customer services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Following the rotation, I would have a Liberal member, an ND member, and a Wildrose member. So where shall we go? We'll go, then, to who I see on their feet. Let's go to Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 201, and I thank the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for helping to edify us around billing. Certainly, the billing is sort of the access point, or the gateway, by which we can see where our consumer bills are. Of course, the vast majority of the bills that are issued by power companies are for individual consumers. I know that every month, especially in the wintertime, people open these bills and are struck with at least two different feelings: first of all, confusion and then often anger at the electricity rates, that are so inordinately high, that we pay here in the province of Alberta.

Confusion, though, is the part that I think this bill is trying to address, and I do support that idea. Of course, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, then you end up making a more transparent, more clear bill that shows you exactly how you're being gouged. I think that's going to be the end result of this. So if that does help to educate people about how, in fact, we pay more than we should here for consumer electricity and for commercial and industrial electricity, too, then perhaps the end result of this long and winding road is that we will in fact move back to a more regulated way of distributing electricity here in the province and get on with giving people a fair price for an essential service, right? It's not as though you choose to use electricity either for your own personal or for commercial or industrial or agricultural use. It's a necessary part of a modern industrial society. So it's incumbent upon us, for things that are mandatory and essential, to ensure that there is a price that meets the capacity for people to pay – right? – here in the province of Alberta. We're not doing that now.

We've seen all kinds of tricks and subterfuge around billing. Of course, the allusion around deregulation was that we would have a more competitive system with more players and more generators and so forth. But, you know, exactly the opposite happened. We still end up with the main five major producers of power that were around before deregulation, and they just come up with innovative

ways to gouge us even more. Try shutting your electricity off, even – let's say you have a cabin or another place – and lo and behold you still end up with a substantial bill every month, right? You know, in a place like, let's say, an older neighbourhood, where you've been paying for those lines and all of those service charges, you've paid for those lines several times over in your own lifetime and probably even more so over time by the previous owners and so forth. This whole notion of deregulation to create a more competitive environment in sort of a fixed thing, an essential service like electricity, is patently absurd.

I appreciate, you know, that if we shine a light on a consumer or an industrial commercial bill and people can see with utter transparency what that bill is going to be, maybe it'll lead eventually to a more reasonable regulated electricity rate that we can count on. The irony of debating this on Monday when on Friday we had a huge sale of our electricity transmission network to one of the wealthiest people in the world, Berkshire Hathaway – it's no coincidence, Mr. Speaker, that they announced that sale approval at 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon, hoping: oh, well, Albertans won't notice that we just sold off a major chunk of essential line service to an American corporation. Of course we noticed it, and we'll notice it on our subsequent bills that will come forward in the coming weeks and months.

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

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I allowed earlier that under relevance, clause (b), we're going to allow some latitude about where a member goes in order to build a case, but I don't allow that we should be allowed to just state a complete misfact in a manner that I find insulting. I let it go just a moment ago when he said that we have only five retailers. We have 25 retailers offering 40 different contracts in Alberta today. That's a matter of fact, and it's right on the website.

Right now what we're talking about is that we're impugning the proceedings of a quasi-judicial body in Alberta, and he's questioning when they did their news release because they apparently did it for some sneaky reason. That's a creation of our government, of this Legislature, and I don't think that kind of language should be allowed to continue.

Mr. Speaker, if he has anything factual to add to the argument, I invite him to go ahead and do so.

Mr. Anderson: I don't even necessarily disagree with anything that the Deputy Government House Leader said in this regard; however, I think we do need to realize that this is a debate. Who's the judge of what's true or not true? The public is the judge of that. There can be disagreement on facts. Maybe he was referring to five major retailers instead of 25.

I mean, we've got to have some latitude in this House to have a discussion. We're not going to agree on all the principles, but we can't be standing up and calling everything irrelevant. Obviously, I disagree with, you know, 99 per cent of the things that member says over there, but I will die for his right to say them. I think that it's important that we accord each other that respect.

Also, on questioning quasi-judicial bodies, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day one of the jobs of opposition is – obviously, we

don't want to impugn the people on the those judicial bodies unless there is great cause to do so, but we can disagree with their decisions. If we feel that they're becoming too much of a rubber stamp, as potentially is the case right now with some decisions that have been made, I think that it's not only the right but the responsibility of opposition to bring that up and to say: "Look, this is looking like a bit of a rubber-stamp process. Perhaps we should take a look at it." I think that's part of our role. I don't think we're impugning the people on it. We're just saying that, obviously, it needs to be improved and strengthened because it's becoming a rubber stamp.

Let's give each other some latitude in this House to have a good debate moving forward and not clutter our House with points of order on relevancy and so forth.

4:00

The Speaker: First we have Rimbey-Rocky Mountain-House-Sundre. Do you wish to chime in? Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Anglin: Just one point, Mr. Speaker: it is prudent to have a difference of opinion around the debate, but where I disagree with the member is that no one is entitled to a different set of facts. The facts are the facts, and that's what we should be debating. Misrepresentation – it doesn't matter whether it's erroneous or whether its deliberate – has to be corrected to have an intelligent debate.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, did you wish to clarify the point that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has been making?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate both the comments from the hon. member from across the way and others. Certainly, I'd have to look back on the Blues, perhaps, to see whether – I don't usually say the word retailer even. I'm thinking that I was talking about producers of electricity – right? – major producers. If I did say it incorrectly, then certainly I would change it. What do you do when you go back on the thing that you did? Retract it.

Otherwise, certainly, it's important for us to cast a light on what is happening, and that's kind of the theme of this private member's bill, to cast a light, more transparency, on the actual bill that people receive. All things flow into, you know, creating that bill and creating the price point that someone has to pay. I believe that there's a problem with our electricity generation and the prices that we pay through deregulation. I'll have to look back and see exactly what I had said in regard to five major producers, which is what I usually say when I'm talking about it, not retailers.

Anyway, thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, there are two very long and well-known traditions of this House. One is to allow the maximum amount of latitude during debate, and the second thing is for the Speaker to oftentimes have to accept two different versions of the same account. Now, I'm going to have to review what was said there as well because I've received a flurry of notes up here during your comments, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I'm going to review those and see if there's any need to follow this up further.

In the meantime let us zoom in on the bill itself, please. Bill 201 is what we're debating. Carry on with your debate. You have five minutes and 38 seconds left.

Debate Continued

Mr. Eggen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I can, in sum, rest my case by saying that I'm interested in voting for this private member's bill. Once again I thank the hon. member for bringing this forward.

The Speaker: We're going next to the Wildrose, followed by a government member, and that means the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is next.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and support Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. I'm really going to try and get through this bill without having some interjections from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, whom I actually like, and, hopefully, from the Minister of Energy, whom I also actually quite like. I'm going to really try and... [interjection]

Mr. Anderson: Whoa. Wait a second, Frank.

He is pretty debonair. You've got to give it to him.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Calgary-Fish Creek has the floor, so let's give it to her, okay?

Carry on.

Mrs. Forsyth: You know, the nice thing, if there's anything nice about being hearing impaired, is that you miss all the conversation that's going on around you. I, quite frankly, can't hear it unless I'm wired in.

Anyhow, Mr. Speaker, if I may, on Bill 201 I am going to stand up in support of it for many reasons. I just want to start with – the member talks about the purpose for the bill, which is to increase transparency in billing, but more importantly it proposes to standardize consumer utility bills so that retail consumers can be better informed about market options. I think that's something that, quite frankly, in the year 2014, December 1, actually needs to be done. I think the public is sometimes confused about determining the difference between fixed rates and variable rates, and the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville started talking about trying to explain the different between the fixed rates and the variable rates. You know, I'm not exactly sure, if we went out and spoke to Albertans, how many of them could really determine the difference between fixed and variable rates and why it's important to know what you're doing.

What I like about this bill is the report on transparency in billing.

Within 6 months from the day this section comes into force, the Commission shall provide a report to the Minister that contains recommendations to improve transparency in the billing of customers and the format of bills sent to customers.

The bill will certainly make electricity bills across the province look the same regardless of the company. The Electric Utilities Act will be amended under Bill 201 so that six months from the amendments coming into force the Alberta Utilities Commission will provide a report to the minister that contains the recommendations for the improvement to the transparency in the billing of customers and the format of electricity bills sent to customers.

I don't think there's an MLA in this Legislature that hasn't had a constituent come in and talk to them about questions that they have when they receive their bills monthly and the complications that arise, especially when we're talking with seniors who are on fixed incomes, low-income earners that are on fixed incomes and

not understanding all of these different billings that are on the particular bill that we're trying to decipher.

I as the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek have struggled through trying to explain to people that have come in to see me the difference between fixed rates and variable rates. One of the things that I've learned over a period of time – the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre sat down and explained to me all of the differences between fixed rates and variable rates. He also talked to me a lot about the market price for electricity and how the markets fluctuate depending on how the electricity prices are influenced by supply and demand and how Albertans will see an increase as the population increases. Of course, electricity increases because of the demand. We talked about the regulated rate option, or the acronym RRO, for regulated electricity rates, that is available to everyone. I just think that what he's trying to do and what he's proposing in this bill, in what I consider a very short bill, is something that truly needs to be done.

He talks about:

(2) The report of the Commission shall include, not may but “shall,” and there's a great difference when we talk about shall and may in legislation, which I've learned,

- (a) a proposed standardized bill for customers that lists all fixed and variable costs, and
- (b) proposed amendments to this Act and any related enactment, including the *Regulated Rate Option Regulation, Alta. Reg. AR 262/2005*,

which I referred to just briefly,

which shall include the replacement of the term “regulated rate” with “variable market rate”.

Then that tells you that the variable rate plan allows your electrical rate to change from month to month based on the fluctuations of the market. Because of the market, it will show that your bill fluctuates every month.

I think that what he's proposed in this bill is quite simple, actually, for a very complicated process that's out there, and I would like to say on record as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek that I will be supporting this bill and will be looking forward to the conversation as we proceed further.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and then we'll see where we go for other opposition parties or back to the government side.

4:10

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got an opinion on mobiles for schools, but I'll try and keep on the topic here.

It is my honour to rise to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Before I begin, I would like to recognize the hon. member for bringing this matter to the attention of the House during an exciting session at the Legislature.

Prior to 1996 Alberta had a Crown electrical utility company in place. Following the privatization of this sector, a handful of companies developed to provide consumers with more choice. Currently the Alberta Utilities Commission, or the AUC, regulates the utilities sector in Alberta. They do so by creating mandatory requirements, the standards for electricity and natural gas markets; furthermore, the AUC engages in consultative processes that allow them to speak with stakeholders and interested parties about these standards.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 asks for a commission to provide a report to the Minister of Energy on transparency in billing for customers. The commission would be specifically asked to include proposals

for standardized billing for fixed and variable costs. When the commission tables their report in the House, Bill 201 would require the minister to implement the recommendations contained in the report within six months. It would also require the minister to introduce any amendments that might have arisen from the report. The legislation could follow on the heels of previous government policies intended to protect and inform consumers.

In 2013 the government took action to protect Albertans by increasing the scrutiny of transmission costs, reducing volatility in month-to-month electricity prices. They did this after consulting the Retail Market Review Committee. This committee put forward two key recommendations: scrutinizing a regulated rate option and extending the regulated rate option from 45 to 120 days. These steps made it easier for consumers to exercise better judgment in their retail choices.

However, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not the only people worried about their electricity prices. Doing a little environmental scan on this issue, countries like the United Kingdom have begun to utilize alternative methods of reporting as well. In the U.K., similar to Alberta in that there are several companies that compete for consumers, their government has recently passed legislation that would ensure that these providers follow a more accountable and transparent reporting process.

Similar to the AUC in Alberta, the U.K. has an organization known as the office of gas and electricity markets. An acronym that doesn't really ring, it's called Ofgem. This organization is considered a nonministerial government department and is an independent national regulator. This organization is independent from government, industry, and stakeholders and operates within the mandate of several pieces of legislation. Ofgem recovers its costs through licensed companies that it regulates. The organization is run by a governing body known as the Gas Electricity Markets Authority. The governing body is comprised of experts who are appointed by the secretary of the state from the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Ofgem differs from the AUC in that it focuses specifically on the interests of gas consumers. Four points make up their key focus: promoting value for money; promoting security of supply and sustainability for present and future generations of consumers, domestic and industrial users; the supervision and the development of markets in competition as well as the regulation and delivery of government schemes.

Mr. Speaker, the first point is most relevant to our discussion today on Bill 201. The value for money refers to the costs that consumers pay for electricity. Ofgem does not control the end-consumer energy price. Instead, they regulate the specific charges that can be passed on to the consumer. Ofgem works to create clarity for end users, allowing them to know what they are buying much like the hon. member's bill intends to do. This regulation enables consumers to be more diligent and mindful about the choices they make. It protects them from hidden costs, which help consumers know exactly what they are purchasing. For families this is of key importance because it allows them to properly set expectations of their bills. Surprise is not a good thing.

Ofgem has conducted numerous reviews of their electricity market so that new regulations can be created to make it more simple, clear, and fair for consumers. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, consumers must be duly notified when electricity prices change. This includes any changes to the market that may undermine consumers. Ofgem has proposed to further protect consumers by conducting a review of domestic automatic rollovers and contract renewals.

After discussion with stakeholders this project is currently undergoing revision but would promote the following: an estimate

of the consumer's annual consumption. It would require consumers to give no more than 30 days' notice to leave the end of a contract. Finally, it would require a receipt of termination notice within five working days. Rules like these allow Ofgem to appropriately consult both industry and consumers. At the present time they are not banned from automatic renewals but are attempting to prevent hidden costs from showing up when their contract is automatically renewed.

Ofgem has been able to take other steps to protect consumers from the practice of what is referred to as misselling. This is a practice of misleading a consumer about the price of their bill and levying higher fees after they have purchased. However, Mr. Speaker, Ofgem does not currently have any way of forcing companies to reimburse consumers for wrongdoing. Instead, it has created an \$8.89 million fund to help reimburse those who have fallen victim to hidden fees, overcharging, and misselling.

Ofgem promotes consumer rights rather than limiting the competitive nature of the company. However, it also recognizes that companies cannot serve the needs of individuals without some regulation. In doing so, it provides clarity and consistency to consumers. Mr. Speaker, I think it would be beneficial to examine and investigate practices like these to see if there are ideas that will pose benefit to our system.

Bill 201 appears to share many similarities with the current U.K. strategy in that it asks for a more in-depth look at how these companies are regulated. In doing so, it protects customers and lets them know what they are purchasing. Mr. Speaker, a review of this nature could align with the work that we've already done and can help us better understand how to help Albertans. As exemplified by the United Kingdom, there have been moves towards more transparency, clarification of prices for these electricity consumers. In 2013 the Alberta government followed a similar action, leading the way for consumers to better access information.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is an important part of the debate surrounding our electrical sector, and I encourage all members to take part.

Finally, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for all his hard work and tireless efforts to promote focus on this issue, transparency for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, anyone from the third party or the fourth party wishing to speak?

If not, let me move on to a government member, Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I'm sorry. We'll go to Airdrie. My apologies for not catching you quicker.

Mr. Anderson: No worries.

The Speaker: Airdrie, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and support Bill 201 and my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I think that this bill does something that I believe is something we should be striving for in a whole bunch of areas, and that is increased transparency. Giving consumers information so that they have it at their disposal so they can make informed decisions and understand what they're paying for, whether that be in their utility bill or whether that be in their taxes or anything else, frankly, I think is a good thing.

You have to obviously do this carefully and step-by-step. You don't want to make, you know, the burdens of paperwork and increased bureaucracy by doing that, but I think this is a relatively small change that would help consumers understand what they're paying for when they pay their utility bills. I think that's very important.

4:20

Obviously, Bill 50 is essentially water under the bridge right now. It's done. It's been repealed. Obviously, the damage was done prior to it being repealed. I think that we all understand here the process whereby a needs assessment was skipped and that these transmission lines were built and therefore in a lot of situations, I would say, without need. Certainly, there were other alternatives that would have been much cheaper. This, of course, has caused a great increase in the cost of our electricity bills, as was predicted by the Wildrose and other parties in this Legislature at the time. I don't think that's in any doubt, and I think that there are, obviously, regrets when you talk with people in the industry, when you talk with people in the government. They certainly even heard these same things from the current Premier, that mistakes were made, and there's no doubt of that.

I think we have to separate the two issues a little bit in that, you know, we have these extra charges on our bills that weren't there before because of Bill 50. Going forward, consumers still need to understand what they are paying for, and they need to understand it clearly. I think that doing so will allow them to – I think that when they make decisions with regard to the electricity costs, it will be a little bit more clear for them on how to make those decisions.

The other piece is that they can hold the government accountable for their decisions on electricity and whether they are agreeing with the current state of affairs with regard to electricity deregulation or if it could be improved. I think that just giving people more information will help them make that decision, and I know some information is already available out there. I mean, I look at my bill every month, and there are some things in there that, obviously, separate out different aspects of the bill, but I think that this would go further in achieving that end.

I think it's important, too, that we understand, you know, that with these property rights bills that we often talk about – the one that kind of, I believe, indirectly relates to this one is Bill 50 – this is certainly not just a rural issue. I think some people like to think that all those bills and the big fights and wars that were waged in this Assembly over those bills were just about the rural folks and that we were just people in rural Alberta, in 12 constituencies, who were just really ticked off because people were building power lines through our constituencies. It was so much deeper than that, Mr. Speaker. It's an issue that doesn't just affect our rural constituents in Alberta. It affected literally every single person that pays a utility bill in the province of Alberta. In fact, it affected way more urbanites than it did folks that live in rural Alberta, and I think that sometimes that was a bit lost in the discussion because this wasn't about NIMBY.

Obviously, part of it was that we don't like to build ugly power lines through pristine landscapes – that's obviously one part of it – but I actually think that was actually, you know, a pretty minor part. Another part was the way it was done, the way the land was chosen, without adequate feedback and consultation. I think a bigger issue, in fact I think by far 95 per cent of the issue, was the fact that all of our constituents now have charges on their bill that could have been easily avoided or decreased, could be a lot less

today if we had built the least possible number of additional transmission lines, just the ones that were needed rather than the ones that were asked for by the transmission companies.

Of course, it was a sole-source contract, which I understand is, hopefully, being addressed going forward by this administration. I hope so. I've heard those words before, but my hope is that that will be addressed. We just heard a little bit from the Minister of Energy, and he's right to say that we do need to place confidence in some of these quasi-judicial bodies, but, Mr. Speaker, that was just the point of why Bill 50 was so egregious, because we completely circumvented that process with regard to assessing which lines were needed and which ones were not. That, to me, was the ultimate disrespect for our quasi-judicial agencies and tribunals that we have to regulate electricity. The name has been changed so much that we'll just call it the electricity board. It changes every few months or so, it seems. So that's a big issue.

With regard to this bill I think that anything that will improve transparency, specifically with regard to an issue as complicated as transmission and electricity generation, is something that we as a House, you know, need to look to support. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, in my view, to not support that in this regard.

Now, this is certainly a good bill, and I will support it. I hope that the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre will – I mean, he was, obviously, a member of our party for a while and has communicated a lot of different things that need changing in the electrical system and the transmission system. I would like to see more bills like this come forward but maybe ones that are even more substantive as it pertains to lowering the costs of electricity for Albertans. I know it's something that he feels passionate about, and I certainly feel passionate about it. Are there ways we can deal, you know, with some of the price spikes that we experience in this province on a fairly regular basis? Is there a way we can do that that will help consumers while still maintaining the spirit of a free-market system and the market signals that are there? Are there ways we can control that?

Some of the spikes that occur: you know, I don't think they're reasonable, especially when there seem to be some questionable decisions regarding the timing of taking plants on- and offline and so forth that lead to these spikes, which, of course, have been widely reported in the news. How much of that is factual and how much of that is speculation I don't know, but I would like to see a way, going forward, that we can limit these spikes for consumers.

Also, on transmission in the future I would like to see, you know, some ideas from the member on recovering some of the costs of the transmission lines for power that is going to flow through to the United States. Perhaps there should be some rules with regard to that and some things put in place to recover some of those costs. I understand there are some rules in that regard, but it's pretty murky, and I'd like to understand that better and see if there are ways that we can deal with that transmission, with recouping some of those transmission costs, and to take some of those costs that are on our power bills under transmission and decrease them.

So there are all sorts of things. I think a deregulated system certainly has some merit. It has, I think, done more good than harm, but I think there are some things wrong with it, and we've gone through enough years now where those need to be corrected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
I have Strathcona-Sherwood Park next.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. I'd like to also thank the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for all of the work that he's put into this bill. I would also like to thank him for not raising a point of order yet at this point, 30 seconds in.

I've also heard from my constituents, as many of us have, that simply don't understand the utility bill, Mr. Speaker. I think also that many of us have had a look at it and all the ancillary charges and bits and pieces that we don't fully understand, and I think it does need to be simplified. I think of all our seniors in Alberta, half a million seniors, many of which are homeowners, that have talked to many of us. They also don't understand their utility bill and what they're really paying for and what the value is or isn't. I know some are even talking about reregulation of the industry in Alberta.

4:30

But we're fortunate in this province. We've got deregulated electricity prices, and they actually have fallen significantly since the regulated rates that we had in 2008. I think the difficulty is that we don't fully understand what these charges are, and that takes us back to, I think, the importance of supporting this bill.

Currently we've got the Alberta Electric System Operator, the AESO, that does the planning for our electrical system in Alberta, and there's a whole process that goes into that. I know some have raised questions about that, but it does require extensive consultation before any applications are even submitted for a transmission project in the province. So the consultation with AESO, and AESO is responsible for the safe and reliable and economic planning of Alberta's interconnected electricity system and the wholesale electricity market, which is extremely complicated.

I was listening to the hon. Member for Airdrie earlier here talking about power being exported to the United States. Now, it's my understanding that Alberta is actually a net importer of electricity, although I know that a number of other provinces, including British Columbia, where there are significant amounts of hydro generation, certainly, are in a position where they can afford to export electricity to the United States. My understanding is that with co-fired generation and natural gas generation and very, very limited hydro in the province of Alberta our cost of power generation is too high, in fact, for us to export.

Just talking about British Columbia, there are a few jurisdictional comparisons perhaps I could talk about with respect to their billing procedures. Specifically, getting back to British Columbia – and then, time permitting, I'll talk about Ontario – today protecting the interests of British Columbians is the B.C. Utilities Commission, BCUC. They're another independent regulatory agency, somewhat similar to the AUC in Alberta, and they're administered under their Utilities Commission Act. Their responsibility is also the regulation of their natural gas and electric utilities market. So that particular body, Mr. Speaker, is responsive to the need for energy across the province. They're also responsible for the needs determination as the AUC is here. Their responsibility is also to protect B.C. utility customers and all of their stakeholders.

Bill 201 would also protect its customers and stakeholders by allowing for transparency in their electricity bills and just ensuring that there are no hidden costs, not just hidden costs but explanations for what the other costs are or, I think ideally, essentially like a bill we get for a number of other utilities like water, which in most cases is somewhat simpler depending on the municipality that you live in and the supplier of your water.

The BCUC regulates a variety of different interdependent activities, including integrated resource planning, construction and expansion of power facilities, utility revenue requirements, rate design, and then also contracts for supply. The regulated utility companies operating in B.C. are B.C. Hydro; the British Columbia Transmission Corporation, BCTC; and, a familiar name to us, FortisBC.

Mr. Speaker, in an article released earlier this year, it was stated that deregulation of the retail electricity markets in Alberta has been strikingly successful. I know many would dispute that. Consumers now have the power to choose between a number of retailers and contracts. I believe the hon. Minister of Energy referred to about 25 different options that consumers now have. I think that choice is extremely important. I think choice definitely, just by market forces, would have kept our electricity costs down. But the point is: how do you know when you don't actually understand your bill?

British Columbians have also enjoyed some of the cheapest electricity rates in North America just because of, as I mentioned earlier, their low historic cost of hydroelectric generation. Hopefully, the river runs all the time and the turbines run all the time. That's got to be a good thing. I don't think there's really much of an off switch in hydro generation, as I understand it, so the more, the better. Because of that, people in British Columbia and, I believe, in a lot of the northwestern United States, customers, have certainly benefited from that. Again, they have benefited from deregulation as we as Albertans have benefited from deregulation.

Now, the regulated electricity rates in Alberta, as I've mentioned before, were consistently higher than the deregulated ones, as cost of production, as I understand it, was earlier. Of course, going back to those market forces, there simply was no competition. The bill was the bill. You had no place to go unless, of course, you decided that you didn't want to use any electricity or you put a generator in your yard or a windmill or whatever it happened to be. So you didn't really have a choice.

B.C. has this low cost of heritage resources. I know there's a lot of electricity trading that goes on, that I had mentioned, and a lot of kind of energy efficient projects that they've been working on also. Their competitive process allows them to require new supplies, that are used in the conservation of power, and that helps them to also preserve their competitive rate advantage. The greatest advantage in British Columbia is, again, that they've been able to generate significant revenue from the export of electricity. As I've mentioned, over the past decade their generation facilities, their hydro, their grid, which, of course, allows them to sell to us and, I would assume, other provinces as well as into the United States, has certainly been a considerable benefit to them because of their flexible hydroelectric system.

Their electricity sector also contributes revenue to the provincial treasury: property taxes, school taxes, grants, and . . .

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

The Speaker: Hon. member, the bell just rang at that time, so we're going to move on in the interest of time.

I would recognize anyone from the third or fourth parties at this time. If not, someone from the Official Opposition, and if not, then let's move on to the next speaker.

Seeing no one else, I am going to Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to participate in the debate on Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forth by

the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I can't tell you over the last number of years how many constituents of Edmonton-Decore have come forward trying to interpret their electricity utility bills, so I am very pleased that this hon. member has brought forward this very important issue with the reason that it is on the minds of many Albertans.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 speaks to a number of strong principles which are foundational items for any government institution or quasi-public or private business organization, namely transparency, which promotes accountability and public disclosure. In our modern society these are pillars of democratic governance which are very critical for the efficient and effective functioning of a modern economy and for fostering openness and public trust. For example, in regard to public organizations like the government many powers are delegated to our public authority, and assurance must then be provided to the delegators – that is, society at large – that this transfer of power is not only effective but also not abused. Transparency ensures that information is available that can be used to measure the authority's performance and to guard against any possible misuse of powers. In that sense transparency serves to achieve accountability, which means that authorities can be held responsible for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, without transparency and accountability trust will be lacking between government and those whom it governs. The result would be social instability and an environment that is less than conducive to economic growth. Today there appears to be an increased commitment by organizations to undertake reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, which, as mentioned, promotes accountability. Also, it allows for stakeholders and citizens to garner information, to have a clearer understanding about the activities of an organization, and at the same time makes the organization more accountable for its activities. It has been suggested that opening a window to the internal workings on the inside creates a greater level of trust. Truth be told, many might say that you won't be trusted unless you are transparent.

Many governments, quasi-public organizations, and private organizations are taking appropriate actions very consistent with law- and policy-making to disclose information in forms that the public can readily find and use. Further, new technologies are being developed to put information about operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. For example, on June 25, 2013, the Rt. Hon. Francis Maude, Minister of Cabinet Office and paymaster general in the United Kingdom, indicated in his speech that the United Kingdom's government in 2013 had the largest data resource web portal in the world, with over 40,000 data files available to the public; further, that the U.K. government's plan is an ambitious one which is committed to working with the public to publish more data sets.

With specific reference to Bill 201 the hon. member is asking the Alberta Utilities Commission to provide a report on transparency and billing to the Minister of Energy. Further, Bill 201 asks the minister to implement the recommendations of the Alberta Utilities Commission within six months of the day the report is provided or to take the necessary steps to implement those recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, engaging parliamentarians on these issues is especially important. I support initiatives which increase transparency, whether it pertains to government or quasi-public or private organizations because, quite frankly, that's what the public expects. Furthermore, I support addressing that utility corporations be required to provide transparent information to their customers as it pertains to all sections of a utility bill. Alberta consumers

deserve to receive utility bills that are transparent in category and meaning and easily understood. Alberta consumers need a radical change regarding the information provided, and they need reassurance that the charges being levied by the utility corporations are not excessive.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 the Electric Utilities Act was amended under the billing regulation to increase the proper standardization of bills prepared by a retailer or an owner for distribution to a customer. Amounts charged to clients are to be displayed in dollars, with little room for ambiguities. In 2013 the government further protected consumers by establishing new regulations where the onus would be placed on electricity transmission companies to provide that the cost of transmission lines is reasonable. Also, the power of scrutiny for transmission projects would be placed under the authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Utilities Commission operates independently and is committed to ensuring that every Albertan whose rights may be directly and adversely affected by the proposed utility application to the Alberta Utilities Commission is informed and has the opportunity to have their concerns heard, understood, and considered in the review process. The Alberta Utilities Commission is a trusted and valued commissioning body, and the people of Alberta can be assured that their best interests are a guiding force in the decision-making process of this organization. Under the watchful eye of this commission Albertans are assured that they are not and will not be paying for unqualified costs associated with building additional transmission lines. Transmission lines are to be built with a high and reasonable standard of due process.

I believe that this speaks to the lengths our government will go to for the people of our province. Transparency is critical for the effective functioning of our modern economy, and as Alberta grows in population, Mr. Speaker, and in opportunities, this becomes more important than ever before for all Albertans. That is why this government has continued to function under transparency initiatives and will do so moving forward.

Bill 201 will include a proposed standardized bill for customers that lists all fixed and variable costs, which could in fact add value to the utility billing process as it pertains to transparency, accountability, and public disclosure.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the information that is available to consumers regarding their utility bills, as highlighted by those hon. members before yours truly in this debate, includes an explanation on charges to buy electricity, administrative fees, transmission charges, distribution charges, local access fees, and rate riders. In addition, information can also be found on how Albertans can measure their electricity usage. This information is provided by the Ministry of Energy, outlining their priority of fair and just pricing and utility bill understanding.

The Alberta Utilities Commission, as the Ministry of Energy has done, also provides a transparent resource on how Albertans can better understand their utility bill. The Alberta Utilities Commission explains that while Albertans may choose their retailer, they are not able to choose their distributor, who delivers the energy commodity to their home. This explanation is easy to understand and fairly straightforward. Albertans are advised that distributors have separate charges from the retailer and are identified separately on their utility bill. Retailers have terms and conditions, Mr. Speaker, regarding their service that are approved

by the Alberta Utilities Commission, which provides guidelines and rules for billing practices.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I highlight this for you today is to point out that the Alberta Utilities Commission and the government are continually serving the best interests of Albertans by providing information.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Opposition members?

Seeing none, let us move on to the next speaker, then. Vermilion-Lloydminster, you're next.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, that was brought forward by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, a member who certainly in his time here in the House can be described in many ways: at times incorrigible, perhaps at times impertinent, and at times irascible. But one thing we can always say about him is that he is indefatigable about the issue that we're talking about today.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, transparency in billing is truly important to all Albertans, but it is also important to the people of Vermilion-Lloydminster. As was just mentioned by the previous speaker, we receive many inquiries in my office in the constituency asking for an explanation with regard to power bills, and it is indeed important that consumers understand completely what they are being charged for. My own personal experience in professional life is that if you present someone with a bill and they don't understand it, they're less likely to be happy about paying it. Especially when we're dealing with something that is an essential need of all Albertans, electrical power, we really can't be in a position where people in any way don't understand what it is they're paying for or why they're paying for it.

Now, various methodologies have been used to try to increase the understanding that Albertans have of their electrical bills, but unfortunately there remains an information gap between what people understand about their bill and what, in fact, the bill is trying to explain. So I'm certainly in favour of Bill 201 in terms of its attempt to make electrical billings more clear, more transparent, and more understandable to the consumer. I think these are important initiatives that are being undertaken by this bill, and I do applaud the member for bringing this forward.

I think that what he's doing, essentially, here is allowing consumers a better understanding of what it is they need to understand to be responsible consumers. Certainly, when I was in professional life, that was something that we encouraged amongst the consumers about the services we provided, and I'm pleased to do that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt your speech; however, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to 5 minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I am now obligated to invite the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to close debate at this stage on Bill 201.

The hon. member.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I would like to say as an ex-Wildrose Party member is that real men wear pink in support of the next bill that is going to be presented here to this Assembly, and I want to make sure it's known, no matter how angry the Member for Edmonton-Centre may be at me. I will get

to some of the facts and the misrepresentations that have been made in response to this bill. First off, the clarity of the bill, the idea that the bill should provide clarity to fixed and variable costs. As the Member for Strathmore-Brooks brought out, he finds it difficult because variable costs change; hence, the name “variable cost.” They do change – that’s why they’re called variable – but the standardization is quite simple. If you know how the costs are calculated and if you know what they’re based on, if you know that they are based, or premised, on the cost of electricity or some other factor, then you as a consumer can manage that knowing the information that you have at your fingertips.

If you were to compare electricity bills today, particularly from the three major retailers of electricity, the formula for incorporating some of these variable costs is not clear. The formula, or the cost on how they’re broken out, is not clear. I presented this when I introduced this bill, that the variable cost for line loss – depending on whether you’re an EPCOR or an Enmax or an ATCO customer, you could have one charge for line loss, or you could have two charges for line loss or three charges and not understand what that means when you’re comparing bills.

I’d like to point out that the Market Surveillance Administrator just published a report called State of the Market 2014: The Residential Retail Markets for Electricity and Natural Gas. That report came out on November 27. What the Market Surveillance Administrator said is that retail competition is not uniform across the province because some customers clearly lack the ability to choose, and that’s based on information. So to have some sort of standardized bill so consumers can make a choice is absolutely paramount to a functioning system.

The Member for Medicine Hat was kind of interesting to me when he mentioned the comparison between utility bills in the market-based system to the utility bills in Medicine Hat. Medicine Hat is a fully regulated, city-owned utility and has no competition. It has a complete monopoly. It is apples and oranges. There is no comparison. When he makes the comparison to the Montana utility, which is a fully regulated, monopolized co-operative, again, there is absolutely no comparison – it is apples and oranges – unless the member wants to go to a fully regulated system again. I haven’t heard that, so I don’t understand the comparison. [interjection] To the Member for Airdrie: I didn’t quite hear that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please address your comments to and through the chair.

Carry on. You have precious little time left.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Market Surveillance Administrator in the same report referred to the barriers to competition in the retail market because of the lack of information that’s available. That’s what this bill is intended to do. It is intended to standardize the reporting of variable- and fixed-rate costs, how they are shown on these electric bills, particularly in regard to the regulated rate option or what’s referred to as the DFOs, or distribution facility owners. That’s your default rate. You ask customers: “Where do you get your electricity from? Who are you buying your electricity from?” Many don’t know.

When you get to the default rate and you’re dealing with the RRO, there is a merging or a bleeding over per se between the distribution facility owner and the retailer. It’s called cobranding in the electricity industry, and it’s interfering with the competitive market.

Again, when the members from the Wildrose Party brought up this issue, they didn’t understand this aspect. The point is simply

this. The distribution facility owners have a competitive advantage to misrepresent and whether intentionally or unintentionally, it doesn’t matter.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

The Speaker: We have some members rising for a division.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it was already read into the record.

The Speaker: I’m sorry. I did not see them rise at the time.

Clerk, had you already started your speech by the time they rose? Did somebody notice?

Well, in any event, I saw members rise, so that usually calls for a division. It’s not the first time that it’s been a split-hair second late. Summon the bells, I guess.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I’d invite you to take your spots quickly, please. Thank you.

A division has been called, requiring a standing vote for second reading of Bill 201, the Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014. [interjections] Hon. members, please. We have a very serious aspect occurring right now, so drop the conversations, and let the table continue on with the official recognition.

For the motion:

Amery	Fraser	McAllister
Anderson	Fritz	McDonald
Anglin	Hale	Notley
Barnes	Hehr	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Horne	Olesen
Bhullar	Jansen	Olson
Bilous	Jeneroux	Quadri
Brown	Johnson, L.	Quest
Cao	Kang	Sandhu
Cusanelli	Kennedy-Glans	Sarich
DeLong	Khan	Starck
Dirks	Klimchuk	Strankman
Dorward	Lemke	Swann
Eggen	Leskiw	Wilson
Ellis	Luan	Woo-Paw
Fawcett	Mandel	Xiao
Fenske		

5:10

Totals: For – 49 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 201 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Boat Inspection and Cleaning

503. Mrs. Leskiw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to rise today and open debate on Motion 503. This province is so fortunate to contain some of the most majestic natural wonders. Alberta is crossed by rivers, dotted with countless lakes, has one of the most spectacular mountain ranges in the world. That also means that we play host to a rich and diverse set of flora and fauna that inhabit these spaces. Embracing nature has always been a core element to Albertans and our communities. This province has gotten to where we are now by harnessing what we have been provided with, tending to farmland, nurturing vast fields of livestock, and fishing in our lakes and rivers.

One factor that plays a large part in our being able to maintain this relationship with nature for such a length of time is our ability to maintain a balance. This often involves limiting the use of our resources in various ways in order to ensure that we do not harm or destroy these natural assets. It is vital that stability is preserved so that future generations are not negatively impacted by actions taken now. However, overuse of our natural resources is not the only dynamic that causes shift in this balance. With an ever-increasing population and one that is highly mobile, Alberta has more people travelling in and out of our province than ever before. This enhances our lives greatly as we're constantly taking in new individuals, new ideas, and proving how incredibly accommodating and welcoming Albertans are.

Unfortunately, these same factors have also greatly increased the risk of this province being overrun by a variety of less welcome guests. Invasive aquatic species can have a devastating effect both environmentally and economically. Once an invasive species is introduced into our natural habitat, it can be nearly impossible to reverse. Invasive species compete with native species for the resources that they need to survive. They can seriously degrade water quality by increasing the concentration of toxins, altering nutrient flows in the food web, reducing the oxygen levels, and increasing its turbidity, or, in essence, its cloudiness.

The impact from this can be widespread in an invasive species altered environment, putting pressure on native species, that are often ill adapted to cope with them. Native species are pushed out of their natural habitat, lose food sources, and are exposed to new bacteria and organisms that can be harmful to sensitive species.

The impact is not confined to environment. Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development estimates it could cost Albertans up to \$75 million annually if the invasive aquatic species were to establish itself in our province. They clog irrigation lines and water infrastructure, hurt tourism, fish, and many other industries that rely on our aquatic spaces.

The time to act is now, before the infestation actually happens. It is vital that everyone travelling in and out of our province is properly educated on this issue. Education is the key. The primary means by which invasive species enter this province is on recreational aquatic vehicles and trailers. Boaters need to be aware of the proper procedure for inspecting, cleaning, and drying their water vehicles as well as of the potential impact of failing to do so.

Currently all boat inspections are voluntary. ESRD and ARD monitor several lakes, irrigation districts, and water bodies throughout the province, but this is woefully inadequate in offering such assurance that we can prevent an invasive aquatic

species outbreak. The fact remains that without organized and enforced protocols and procedures and without a more comprehensive invasive aquatic species strategy, we are at a much greater risk of taking in an unwelcome guest that we can never get rid of.

Mr. Speaker, I am greatly encouraged by the increased awareness surrounding this issue that we have produced as of late, but I also think this still falls short of what needs to be done in order to offer some reassurance that we are fully prepared. It cannot be understated that once an outbreak happens, it can be all but impossible to eradicate any invasive aquatic species. The time to act is before this takes place. That is why I am asking all my colleagues to join the fight against invasive species by supporting my Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Hale: Well, thank you. It is my pleasure to stand and speak to the member's motion to "introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms." This is a huge concern all over Alberta, especially in southern Alberta and the area I represent, Strathmore-Brooks. We have two huge irrigation districts, the Eastern irrigation district and the Western irrigation district, who have spent a lot of time learning about these invasive species. I was at a seminar put on by ESRD in Brooks during the EID's annual general meeting. A lady came down and gave a very good explanation of what is happening and what needs to happen.

I think it's so important. You know, I was talking with my colleague from Chestermere-Rocky View. They have Chestermere Lake, a beautiful lake. It feeds the WID irrigation. Along with many other of the irrigation lakes and reservoirs in my riding, they have lots of recreation. They are dual purpose. They allow the farmers and ranchers to irrigate; plus, they allow recreational users to bring their boats for fishing.

The member who proposed this motion stated that the annual cost would be about \$75 million if we allow these mussels and species to enter our waterways. I don't really know if that's enough. I think it could have the potential to be more than that. They're very, very hard to control. Once they get in, they just take over. The ecosystem in our lakes will be devastated. The cost is not only to the government to look after these issues, but it's also the cost to the individuals.

You know, I'm an irrigation farmer. I've got a couple of pivots that irrigate grass and crops. Man, if my pipes all of a sudden get all clogged up with these mussels, I've got hundreds and hundreds of metres of main line that I've got to rip out of the ground and replace.

It's something that will be tough to get a handle on and make sure that boats coming in – I think education is huge. We have to continually educate the recreational users bringing their boats in and out of the province. I listened to a video clip this morning, that, actually, I shared with caucus, about one of the lakes – I think it was in Minnesota – that they had. They showed underwater pictures of the bottom of the lake, and it was solid mussels. They just said: you know, we can't control them. The girl that came to Brooks to the EID AGM had pictures of a shopping cart they pulled out of the lake. You could kind of tell it was a shopping cart. It was totally covered. I mean, they just stick to everything.

5:20

You know, I support this motion. I think it's something that we all have to advocate for. I hope the government takes this one step further and implements some sort of inspection stations. I think they had four this past summer, and they were voluntary inspections. I know they have dogs trained that can smell the boats and tell if they have these mussels. It's so important.

The cost: you know, that's something we're going to have to look at, if there are user fees or some sort of cost control measures. It may enhance people looking after it themselves before they leave a lake if they know: okay; if we go through an inspection, it's going to cost us to have our boat cleaned if it isn't clean. That's something that we can definitely work on together with the government and all the different agencies in Alberta that are affected by this.

In closing, I'd just thank the member for bringing this forward. It's a huge, huge issue. If you don't know much about it, I suggest you do a lot of research and find out how bad they actually are and how important it is to keep them out of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

To the fourth party. Let's go the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is a necessary motion. It's a problem that we're seeing move across the country and move across the continent, really. I mean, of course, these species or any organisms don't necessarily respect national boundaries or provincial boundaries. The zebra mussels are moving east and north and south at the same time, I suppose, and there is a direct economic and environmental impact because this is an invasive species, that is not native to most of or, really, any of North America. A lack of predator control makes it pretty obvious. Of course, it does plug up your infrastructure in regard to water pipes and so forth and creates levels of toxicity in lakes and other bodies of water, so it's pretty obvious.

I think that we can work to perhaps combat these invasive species like zebra mussels in conjunction with other invasive species as well such as the more long-standing problem of the Eurasian water milfoil. We know that this has been a problem in other parts of the country longer and in the province to a certain extent. It's clear that washing boats really does make a difference. Most people don't necessarily do that. Of course, I think that we need to make sure that we provide a way by which people can do this, right? It's one thing to make a law, and then it's something else to actually have a mechanism by which people can actually follow the law and wash their boats and remove invasive species or seeds and/or remnants of organisms that can get into the next lake.

As New Democrats we certainly are supporters of environmental protection, and we know that there is an ongoing problem with things such as algae blooms in this province right now. I mean, we hate to correct the hon. member that introduced this bill, but we don't have countless lakes. We have a very limited number of lakes, and you can't presume that without stringent protection they will just remain as good as they were before, right? I mean, that's important to consider. We know that, let's say, the blue-green algae problem is growing, and it's not just from invasive species, Mr. Speaker, but from fertilizer and from animals adjacent to lakes as well.

Certainly, this is an issue that needs to be dealt with. We have to make sure that we do put people into actually enforcing this

motion, but in the balance certainly I do support this motion, and so do the Alberta New Democrats.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first of all would like to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing forward this motion. I think it's a very appropriate motion at this point in time as there is certainly some work that we've been doing in Environment and Sustainable Resource Development that follows along this line, particularly knowing that this is a particular issue that has been getting closer and closer to our borders and is something that we must all be aware of and that we must on behalf of Albertans take action on. That action would be aiming to protect our aquatic environments and infrastructure from invasive species like these particular mussels.

What happens, Mr. Speaker – I'll just go through a brief overview of why this is a problem – is that when these mussels become introduced into our aquatic ecosystems, they start competing with the native wildlife in the ecosystem. They start to filter out vital nutrients, they start to clog infrastructure such as irrigation and municipal water systems, and they are linked to toxic algae blooms. Essentially, these types of experiences have caused billions and billions of dollars in damage across the world up to this point, and this is something that is a significant financial risk to this province and something that we must do everything within our means to avoid.

As I mentioned, jurisdictions outside of our borders have already been experiencing negative onsets of invasive species in their aquatic ecosystems for years now, and it's estimated that that financial risk to this province is about \$75 million per year, again something that I don't think the Alberta taxpayers are particularly interested in footing the bill for if we can possibly prevent it.

As I said, jurisdictions closer to our borders have recently experienced the invasion of these species into their lakes and water systems. It was in October of 2013 that zebra mussels were identified in Lake Winnipeg. This was the first time invasive mussels have been found in a prairie province, and, Mr. Speaker, once an infestation begins, it can be almost impossible to stop. The potential solutions can have their own environmental trade-offs. This is why we are working hard as a province on preventing invasive species from crossing our borders.

Part of this work is public education, Mr. Speaker; that is, encouraging boaters to clean, drain, and dry their boats every time that they remove them from the water. These simple steps are critical to ensuring these particular species are not present in Alberta's lakes and infrastructures.

Another step that we are taking is the monitoring for invasive species and encouraging Albertans to report to our hotline any evidence of mussels that they might see, and we have a particular number. I want to highlight that. It's 1.855.336.BOAT. That's 1.855.336.2628. Perhaps one of the most important tools, though, Mr. Speaker, that we can bring to bear on this issue is about inspections, which is of the nature of this particular motion from the hon. member.

5:30

Last year between the month of June and the end of August we completed 2,500 inspections of boats entering into Alberta. As a result, there were two boats that were headed for Alberta's lakes that were found to have zebra mussels attached to them. One of

the contaminated boat owners admitted and expressed extreme thankfulness for the inspection because they didn't want to be the person responsible that would bring these mussels into an Alberta lake. There were another 99 boats of the 2,500 that were deemed high risk, and by high risk we mean those that were coming from states that have had infestations of mussels or they were coming from states or provinces where there were no inspection or monitoring programs in place.

To help strengthen this program, one of the things that we've started to utilize is sniffer dogs. These are highly trained dogs that are able to sniff out zebra and quagga mussels that are attached to the boats. These mussels, in fact, at times are so small that you can't even see them, and these highly trained animals can actually sniff them out. Of course, all of the actions that we've taken at this point around inspection have been voluntary, Mr. Speaker, and with only about half of the boaters stopping to have their watercraft inspected last summer, we are thinking that stricter measures may be necessary to protect our waterways.

Today's motion asks our government to implement even greater proactive measures to prevent invasive species from getting a foothold in Alberta. I'm proud to say that our government is giving consideration to a number of improvements to these preventative actions, including making boat checks mandatory. Aquatic invasive species are a serious matter that must be dealt with in a proactive manner, and if Alberta were to make boat checks mandatory, we would be the first province to do so.

Since Manitoba discovered mussels in Lake Winnipeg, they have outlined early detection and rapid response as critical priorities for saving habitats from invasive species. You know, upon early detection in Manitoba species are placed in one of two categories that outline minimum management criteria used to begin steps of action. If feasible, eradication is the first option if species are detected. A lead agency is quickly formed, and a management committee develops an eradication strategy. Education and awareness initiatives are also implemented there so that the public are able to become proactive leaders in assisting with the containment, detection, and extermination of these species.

In 2012 Ontario established an invasive species strategic plan. The current threats posed by invasive species in Ontario are significant, Mr. Speaker. Compared to other provinces, the number of invasive species in Ontario is actually the highest, with Quebec and British Columbia trailing only slightly behind. The Ontario government has been able to utilize a national program that provides a strategic invasive species framework under which provincial plans can be developed. It's the Ontario ministry of natural resources that has taken a lead on this. The objective of their strategic plan is to prevent new invaders from arriving and surviving in the province of Ontario and to slow and, where possible, reverse the spread of existing invasive species. The steps of the action founded in Ontario's strategic plan are: one, to prevent; two, to detect; three, to respond; four, to manage; and, five, to adapt.

I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion because in doing so, we can prevent and detect and do those first two action steps and, hopefully, never have to get to the last three: respond, manage, and adapt.

Ontario's strategic plan also highlights the importance of working with neighbouring jurisdictions and the federal government, specifically on research, monitoring, and enforcement. [interjection] One more minute. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I believe today's debate speaks to these relationships and urges our province to become a clear leader in preventing invasive mussels. Certainly, this is something that I

brought up with the Minister of Environment from Saskatchewan, who I've had the opportunity to chat with. This is something that interests both of our provinces. They've been very helpful in working towards our strategy in holding back the mountain pine beetle because they have a very keen interest to ensure that it doesn't move eastward. I think we have the same interest in ensuring that invasive mussels don't move westward. So working with other jurisdictions is very, very important.

Again, I'd like to thank the hon. member for her leadership with this motion. This is something that our department is taking very seriously. We must act now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

A member from the Wildrose? Yes. Cypress-Medicine Hat, please.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a brief minute and, first of all, thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her motion. I thank the ESRD minister for his words and his understanding around the situation. I, too, very, very much support the motion for all the reasons that everyone mentioned, how invasive these species are. The cost, I think, is \$75 million. It could be underestimated if our lakes had a huge problem or our irrigation pipes all clogged up.

I just wanted to stand and, you know, reiterate my support. The costs around it: I'm glad to hear that you're going to be having some discussion on that. After all, we are a rat-free province, and the costs of keeping us rat free are usually accepted. That's okay from the taxpayers' standpoint. I'm not sure if boating would fall into the same category or if a user fee would be more in line. It seems to be.

I think that this motion is well on the way to handling what we have to handle, to make sure that this invasive species doesn't cost our economy millions of dollars. I, too, will support it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Third and fourth parties? Anyone wishing?

If not, let me move on to the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to just make a few comments on Motion 503, which I plan to support. I'll keep it brief because a lot of it has been said. I think that there's no way to underestimate the risk that these invasive species could mean to our waterways. I thank the member for bringing this forward. I know that she has a lot of pristine lakes and so on in her part of the world as we do throughout the province. Strathmore-Brooks, of course, mentioned the catastrophic impact it could have on irrigation systems in southern Alberta. I think it's good that the member has brought this forward to profile it up, and I thank the hon. minister of environment for his comments.

I think my only question or concern would be how the inspection process would work. I understand that coming across the international border from the United States, there's obviously a very thorough process for dealing with traffic. The traffic coming in from our neighbouring provinces and territory to the north: I'm not quite sure how we will catch that. But those are things that can all be dealt with between the environment ministry and, I would think, the Solicitor General, Transportation, and others, so we'll leave that up to them.

I fully plan to support the motion and would encourage all of the other members here to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any other opposition members?

If not, then let me move on to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to get to say a few words relating to Motion 503, which states: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce mandatory inspections and cleaning of boats entering Alberta in order to protect our lakes from harmful and invasive organisms." I also want to acknowledge and thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. This is a very important issue, and it's very important that we raise the awareness of all Albertans about it.

5:40

I would like to speak for a minute or two regarding the agricultural context to which this applies. This is not a theoretical issue. It is something that is of great importance to our agricultural industry, which is the second-largest industry in Alberta. I'll just provide you with a few facts, Mr. Speaker. My comments are going to be focused on our irrigation infrastructure.

Irrigation in southern Alberta supplies water to some million acres of land and 50 reservoirs. We have infrastructure that includes 8,000 kilometres of canals and pipelines, and they're worth an estimated \$3.5 billion. Each year my department provides grants to irrigation districts in southern Alberta, which then partner with them the money that they raise. The contribution of government at this point is around \$20 million, \$21 million a year. I also would say that a figure like \$75 million in costs to us seems light when one thinks about the devastating effect that damage to our irrigation infrastructure could have.

It should also be noted that Alberta has about 70 per cent of the national irrigation infrastructure, and those acres support 55 different crops, a very diverse collection of crops, many of which people don't really even think of when they think of agriculture in Alberta, and some of them are very high value. As a matter of fact, 20 per cent of the total food production in Alberta comes from these irrigated areas. Also, as has already been mentioned, it's not just for agricultural production, but it's also for recreation and the life of many rural communities. Some 50 rural communities rely on irrigation infrastructure.

I was in Lethbridge some time ago, and one of our staff in my department showed me some cutaway pipes and what they look like once they've been affected by these invasive species such as mussels. It really is a powerful thing to see when you see a pipe that's completely closed off, and one can imagine the concern that our agricultural producers and many people who live in the irrigated areas have when they contemplate the kind of damage that could be done.

I want to acknowledge the work that's being done by my colleague the Minister of ESRD and his department for the work that they are doing. He has mentioned the voluntary inspections that have already been undertaken. We can see, I think, clearly that preventative action is what is so important here. We can't wait for it to hit us and then try to react. I suppose the challenge will be to come up with things that we can do that are practical in their application. As has already been mentioned, that may be easier in some parts of the province than in others, but I think this is a very valuable conversation for us to have. It will lead us towards a greater awareness, greater education, and also some more effective steps that can be taken to prevent very significant damage to Alberta and its infrastructure.

Once again, thanks to the hon. member for bringing it forward, and I look forward to hearing further debate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I have Calgary-Bow, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. As Canadian vice-president of PNWER, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, this is something that we have been working on for a few years. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region is five states and five provinces and territories that are the only part of North America that is not infected by the quagga and zebra mussels. Pretty well the whole rest of North America is infected.

Now, they came from Russia decades ago, actually, into the Great Lakes and have since spread from there. Where they come from has very low calcium in the water, so back there they are not especially a problem. But here we tend to have high calcium. The sedimentary basin that we live in produces an awful lot of calcium coming through. Because of that we are especially vulnerable to these.

They are wonderful creatures. They take the water, which, you know, looks a little bit murky maybe because of all the stuff in it, and totally clean it. Totally clean it. You have beautiful water. You can see down 20 feet, 50 feet. Unfortunately, nothing else can live there because, essentially, the mussels eat everything except for blue-green algae. They will not eat blue-green algae, unfortunately. If it gets into a lake, you end up with the mussels everywhere, these sharp mussels so that you can't, especially, walk in bare feet. So your lakes are rather yucky around the outside. But the blue-green algae just wonderfully blooms there. So they are really bad. You know, we've already talked about effects on agriculture.

By the way, we are looking right now at control measures that cost \$1 million, \$2 million, \$3 million, but the actual cost once they come is about \$50 million per year – per year – to try to control them. Now, they used to be – our biggest vulnerability actually was Lake Mead down in California, and it's totally infected. So the idea was to protect our southern border, and that's what we were working with in PNWER, protecting the southern border, but then we got the infection in Lake Winnipeg. Now, we sort of had this hope – this hope – that massive doses of fertilizer might kill them off. That was the idea. What we did was that we put potash in there, and we put enormous amounts of potash just in the bays where they had found them. Unfortunately, it didn't work. There has been in the world – they have not yet found a way of controlling them. Essentially, all you can do is put a border around them, and we've been working on the outer border, but of course that is not good enough. We need to work also on our border, on the Alberta border.

So I urge you to support this motion, and hopefully we can up our game a little bit and make sure that they never do come here. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer some perspective from the point of view of my experience as a veterinarian and also from the point of view of animal disease control. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this motion. It is a very important issue. The potential damage has already been well laid out by my colleagues on both sides of the House. My comments don't mean to minimize this in any way, but I do want to state that control of this particular organism, of these

two species of mussels, is going to be a lot harder than I think we realize.

From an epidemiological standpoint – epidemiology is the study of disease patterns, and we really have to consider these organisms as disease organisms. We've already talked a little bit about the hardness of these mussels: their ability to spread, their ability to survive outside of water, their ability to escape detection because, in fact, they reproduce through veligers, which are a tiny larval form, which are microscopic; they can't be seen. The work that the hon. Minister of ESRD described with regard to dogs that can actually smell these mussels is incredible work, and these are incredibly sophisticated dogs. Nonetheless, the control of this organism through visual means alone is inadequate.

Really, it was mentioned in the hon. mover's motion that education is the key, and she is right. Truthfully, to rely only on an enforcement mechanism to prevent this mussel from entering into our province is, I would suggest to you, doomed to failure. Our border simply cannot be guarded in a way that is practical when you consider that a good chunk of our Alberta-Saskatchewan border has crossings every two miles.

5:50

Mandatory inspection, while it sounds like a good idea, would truly require that all watercraft be funneled into specific inspection stations along the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. This year we had voluntary inspection at the Vermilion weigh scale, for example, and in fact one of the two cases that the minister mentioned was actually determined at the Vermilion weigh scale. But the Vermilion weigh scale is 60 kilometres into Alberta, and there are a lot of places where people driving watercraft can drive in on highway 16 and then drive either north or south before they ever reach the Vermilion weigh scale. So if we're going to be realistic about controlling this organism and preventing its relocation into the province of Alberta, we have to set up these inspection stations right at the border or, even better, talk to the Saskatchewan government and establish them in Saskatchewan.

The truth of the matter is that when you're talking about disease control and when you're talking about, you know, making sure that organisms don't get into our province, we are dealing with a very, very difficult situation given the mobility of populations and given the multiple routes that you can go through. In fact, when we talk about disease control from a point of view of other diseases that we have to watch out for from an animal health standpoint, if the province of Saskatchewan is infected, the province of Alberta is essentially considered as infected as well. Diseases like foot-and-mouth, rinderpest, bluetongue, anaplasmosis, or any of the other foreign, reportable diseases that we have to be worried about that would have an equal or greater economic impact as zebra and quagga mussels: Alberta would already be considered as an infected area.

So while, again, I applaud the member for raising the awareness of this – and it is extremely important for anyone who is involved with any sort of aquatic recreation. In fact, it's not just boaters. Scuba divers, your scuba equipment can be a mechanical vector for these organisms. Fisherman, if you use live bait and transfer live bait from one body of water to another, they can act as a mechanical vector for these organisms.

There is a lot of additional information we need, and when we say rinse, clean, and dry your boats, in fact, you should be rinsing

the boats with high-pressure sprayers, with 200 psi sprayers, or you should be soaking them with over 40 degrees Celsius water. That's how you have to kill these organisms. They are extremely tough. They are extremely hardy. So with the investment that we have to make, I would suggest, in some form of mandatory inspection, while I understand the desire for that, I will tell you that from a practical standpoint, quite frankly, I don't think it will work.

I think our best investment and our best way to summon our resources to try to prevent this is to provide as high a level of public education as we possibly can as to the gravity and the consequences of introducing these organisms into our province and to let recreational watercraft owners and other people who frequent lakes outside of the province of Alberta that might be infected with these organisms know the kind of measures that they have to take to make sure that they aren't the ones to bring this organism into Alberta.

The consequences are devastating. There is no question about that. That has been well covered by other colleagues, but I will tell you that a mandatory inspection program alone, without a thorough education program, will not work. I'm supportive of this motion because I'm supportive of the direction in restricting these organisms from getting into our province, but, Mr. Speaker, a mandatory inspection program alone, in my opinion and based on my experience in terms of health control of foreign diseases in our country, would not work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all my colleagues for speaking on this very important motion. Doing nothing is not an option. We need to do something. Doing nothing, we're going to devastate this province, and education is a start, and just by bringing this motion forward, we in this room are already a little bit more educated than we were before this motion was even introduced. I live in an area that is the Lakeland area. If this got into our lakes, that's a lot of our bread and butter for tourism, for our beauty, and so on.

The only thing that I have to say is that I trust that our Ministry of ESRD will bring some sort of measure forward to help protect this. I agree with the minister there, that we need to educate. We need to educate our boaters, our fishermen on the devastation of this. I urge all my colleagues to vote for it if for nothing else than to bring this topic forward and to educate the Alberta public about it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until the evening session, which starts at 7:30 tonight. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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