



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature  
Third Session

# Alberta Hansard

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Issue 13

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)  
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    Deputy Government House Leader  
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Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
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Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (W),  
    Official Opposition Deputy House Leader  
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)  
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)  
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

## Party standings:

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

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Eggen	Rogers
Hehr	Rowe
Horne	Sarich
Kennedy-Glans	Stier
Luan	Towle
McDonald	

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

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Jablonski

Amery	Lukaszuk
Barnes	Mason
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Horner	

### Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Olesen  
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Cusanelli	McAllister
Eggen	Quest
Fenske	Rodney
Fox	Sandhu
Fritz	Swann
Jablonski	Weadick
Leskiw	

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Bilous	Rowe
Brown	Stier
DeLong	Strankman
Fenske	Swann
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Jablonski	

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

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Calahasen	Young
Cao	

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 8, 2014

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week of important work in and for our province we ask for renewed strength to help guide us in our duties as members of this Legislature. We ask for the continued protection of this Assembly and also of those whom we serve. Amen.

Today being Monday, let us join with Robert Clark as he leads us in the singing of our national anthem.

Thank you.

### 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, everyone. Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

**Mr. Prentice:** Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured today to rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the ambassador of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Luo Zhaohui, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Accompanying the ambassador today are Mrs. Jiang Yili, the spouse of His Excellency, who is also a counsellor at the embassy in Ottawa; also, Mr. Yu Benlin, Mr. Zhao Wenfei, and Mr. Yang Tianwen, all from the embassy in Ottawa. Mr. Wang Xinping, consul general of the People's Republic of China in Calgary, is also in the gallery as is Ms Wang Lei and Mr. Wang Xuhong, also from the consulate general. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and it is truly an honour for us in this Legislative Assembly to have him here today.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a long and important relationship with China. China is, in fact, Alberta's second-largest export market, and our trading relationship with the People's Republic of China is valued at more than \$3 billion. Looking to the future, I believe there is tremendous potential for greater collaboration between Alberta and China. I would now kindly ask Ambassador Luo and his delegation to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Welcome to our visitors.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** We have some additional guests in the Speaker's gallery. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you very special guests from the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee. All of my guests are seated in

your gallery. They are Mr. Mehar Singh Gill, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Sangha, Mr. Avtar Singh Birk from Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Pal Singh Purewal and Dr. Bikkar Singh from Siri Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara. Mr. Zora Singh Grewal from Gurdwara Nanaksar and Mr. Surinder Singh Hoonjan from Gurdwara Millwoods were unable to attend today. With their great efforts the Sikh community was able to donate to Edmonton's Food Bank this holiday season. I will highlight their efforts during my member's statement. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Thank you and welcome.

Let us proceed with other important guests. We have some school groups. Let's start with Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Mr. McDonald:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of students from the Rosedale Christian school in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. They are in the members' gallery this afternoon with their teacher, Stephanie Dueck. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Liberal opposition, followed by the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the member from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students that will be in the Legislature later during question period. They're from Right Track senior high school in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and they'll be accompanied by their teachers, Brian Gizzie and Ted Welsby. I would ask members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Dorward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the second consecutive week I get to introduce students and teachers from Forest Heights elementary school, one of my wife's alma maters. We have 23 visitors in the members' gallery, including two teachers, Mr. Waylon Chinski and Miss Alison Dahmer. I had a short visit with these students. They're in for the week, so I'll be visiting with them more on Wednesday. If the students could please stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Mandel:** Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 19 grade 6 students from Monsignor William Irwin Catholic elementary school in the amazing constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud who are seated in the public gallery. These students are here to view question period following their participation in the legislative school program earlier this year. Accompanying these students is their teacher, Mme Carol Dyck. I'd like them to please rise and accept the customary welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there other school groups? None.

Let's move on to other important guests, starting with Edmonton-Decore, followed by Edmonton-South West.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, a highly esteemed organization celebrating 40 years of establishment in our great province. Through their tireless leadership and steadfast commitment this organization has established a rich and unique identity and contributions within the Ukrainian community and well beyond the borders of Alberta. I extend my sincere admiration and appreciation to all of those community leaders and volunteers from the past, present, and future, whose contributions will serve as a subtle reminder of the progress and success achieved throughout the intervening years.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would kindly ask that they please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Ms Olesia Luciw-Andryjowycz, president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; Ms Daria Luciw, past president, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council; and, with regret, Mrs. Slavka Shulakewych, provincial co-ordinator, Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council, who was unable to attend. Please join me in providing a very special traditional welcome. Congratulations.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests seated in the members' gallery. These two ladies met with me this morning to introduce me to Generations of Hope, which is an Alberta charity that raises funds to assist couples in accessing assisted reproductive technologies to build their families. The goal of this charity is to put the hope of having children within reach of those struggling with infertility. Terri Abraham conceived both of her children through assisted reproductive technologies, and since the birth of her first son she's volunteered at Generations of Hope by running the very successful annual Images of Hope gala. Terri sat on the board for two years before becoming president in 2013. With Terri is Nicole Williams, who is no stranger to this building and a friend to many of us. They are meeting with MLAs this week to discuss funding for in vitro fertilization. I would now ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of introductions today of guests who contribute not only to my constituency but to the province as a whole. My first guest, who I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, is Carla Costuros. Carla is an Edmonton artist whose artwork, called *Mary's Daughter*, is currently displayed in the rotunda to mark the anniversary of the massacre at l'école Polytechnique. *Mary's Daughter* attempts to document the Montreal massacre with a history of women striving to achieve their potential. The Marys referred to are Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, two women's rights pioneers from the 17th and 18th centuries whose writing, sadly, 300 years later still retains currency as we mourn the loss of 14 bright young women who dared to enter a masculine profession. I'd ask Carla to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Your second introduction.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. My second introduction. I'm pleased to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly my guests from the Strathcona Place Senior Centre. Jeff Allen is the former executive director of the Strathcona Place society, and I would like to thank him for 41 years of continuous service, leadership, and inspiration to community, the board, the members, and the membership of the seniors' centre. I'd also like to introduce to you and to the Assembly the incoming executive director of the Strathcona Place Senior Centre, Ms Linda Ensley. I would ask them now to both stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Your third and final introduction.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three hard-working representatives of the 12th annual Ice on Whyte festival, being held in my constituency January 23 to February 1, 2015. Rob McDonald is the board president, Karen Tabor is the secretary-treasurer, and Wanda Bornn is the festival producer. I'm proud of the hard work the volunteers, board, and members and staff contribute to this exciting festival. I look forward to working with them to ensure that Ice on Whyte receives full support for this wonderful event. I would now like my guests to stand and receive, once again, the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**Mr. McAllister:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine and an absolutely crucial, vital member of the community of Chestermere. I'll ask him to rise while I tell you about him briefly. His name is Preston Pouteaux. He is a pastor at Lake Ridge community church. At Lake Ridge, like many other churches, their work does not begin and end on Sunday. They are all about community, and Preston backs this wholeheartedly. He is as involved as anybody in our wonderful town. He was actually raised in Saskatchewan, and when he was a young man, his father would take him to the Assembly there to watch politics. He's involved because, like the rest of us, he wants to make this wonderful province even better. If you ever need a partner in November, I suggest he'd be a good candidate. Colleagues, would you join me in welcoming Pastor Preston today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, leader of the Alberta Liberal opposition, for the first of two introductions.

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Helga Mathison and Andy Nicoli. In the late '70s Helga convinced the provincial government to fund home care for all Albertans in need of it, not just for those over 65. Today she's advising us to deliver more world-class, nonprofit, community-based home care as one solution for fixing health care. She's accompanied by her home-care worker, Andy Nicoli. Andy was born in Padova, Italy, and immigrated to Canada in 1952. He's 86 years old and Alberta's oldest home-care worker. I'd ask Helga and Andy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, I also rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Nalina Kumar. Nalina

is a meditation teacher who is passionate about preventative health and wellness for all Albertans. She volunteers her time to teach meditation at schools and in the community. In fact, she has even volunteered her time to teach Alberta's MLAs meditation so that we can have a calmer atmosphere in the Legislature. I would ask Nalina to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

### Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Human Services.

#### Violence against Women and Girls

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to remember the 14 young women whose lives ended in an act of violence 25 years ago at l'école Polytechnique de Montréal. These innocent women were gunned down for no reason other than their gender and the fact that they were pursuing an education and following their dreams. Extreme violence against women might seem like a problem from another place. It might seem like something that happens in less developed countries, or perhaps it seems like a problem of the past, something that happened long ago. But it remains a global problem that affects women where they live, work, learn, and even where they go on the Internet.

Violence against women and girls takes many different forms. It is not limited to any culture, country, or specific group of women. Aboriginal women are a particularly vulnerable population, and aboriginal women are at a significantly higher risk of violence and face violence at much higher rates than nonaboriginal women in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we all know this violence must stop. Violence against women and girls has significant consequences. Children who witness violence against their mothers experience such a high level of stress that their brain development is delayed, and their future success is put in jeopardy.

We all have a role in helping to end violence in this province by supporting and building strong families and communities. The Alberta government supports violence prevention programs that focus on teaching people how to build healthy relationships throughout their lives. For example, through the family violence information line callers can access individuals who speak 170 languages, and we support women's emergency shelters and counselling services across the province to assist women facing violence and who need immediate assistance. These are important initiatives, but government alone cannot stop violence against women.

Violence and discrimination against women is a serious human rights issue as well. Everyone, not just the people in this Assembly, must recognize this issue as very real, still rampant despite the passing of 25 years. All Albertans, men and women, need to stand up and speak up in all forums to end violence against women. We must never ever forget.

**The Speaker:** The hon. deputy House leader for the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women, which happened last Saturday. Established by the Parliament of Canada, this day marks the anniversary of the murders of 14 young women at l'école Polytechnique de Montréal. Their deaths 25 years ago shocked a nation.

Since 1991 Canadians have worn white ribbons on that day to reflect upon the violence that women and girls face daily in this country. The white ribbon is a symbol of a commitment to action against misogyny and as a commitment to build a society that does not tolerate gender-based violence. Twenty-five years later and we still have much work to do.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important issues of our time. Even today Canadian airmen are in harm's way fighting an enemy whose principal point of difference with us is how women and girls are treated. Here at home we've heard calls for a public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. Every year in Alberta thousands of women flee violence and seek the safety and support of our emergency shelter network.

The minister is correct when she suggests that government alone cannot be the solution and that all men and women, particularly men, have a greater role to play. I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, imploring the men across this province and this country who resort to violence against the women in their lives, whether that be their girlfriend, their wife, their sister, their mother, their daughter, to seek help and to stop. There is so much to be done to create a world where every girl can grow up and reach her full potential and can live a life free of violence.

In 1989 14 young women were killed simply because they were women. We must never forget that, and we must constantly strive for a society, a Canada, and a world where that can never happen again.

Thank you.

**1:50**

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, unanimous consent has been requested for the third party, the fourth party, and the independent member to participate briefly in this important exchange.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Let us begin with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for the indulgence of the House to be able to add a few words of remembrance for the victims of l'école Polytechnique and its shootings. These 14 women were targeted because they were women. These murders shook us, but they also strengthened our resolve to work towards a more equal and just society in memory of those women and all women who are victims of active, direct violence.

But violence has another side: passive, indirect violence; sexual harassment in the workplace; the violence of poverty, which contributes to degrade women, especially single mothers, and force women into unsafe relationships and prostitution; and homelessness, creating high-risk situations for them and for their children.

Last year 17,000 women fleeing violence in Alberta, some with children, were turned away from shelters due to lack of space. It reflects a growing disconnect in a government that chooses to not bring in enough revenue to get ahead of Alberta's growing health and social problems by investing in prevention and early intervention.

What of the thousands of missing and murdered aboriginal women? We as the Legislature can do more to prevent these tragedies, but it will take significant new investment to reduce the vulnerability of aboriginal mothers, sisters, and daughters, improve access to culturally appropriate education, access to quality health services, to early childhood supports, and surely it's time, Mr.

Speaker, for a cold, hard look at how racism continues to haunt our society.

If this government is serious about learning from our tragic fatalities, we must establish independence of the Chief Medical Examiner's office from the Justice department. Ministerial denials of interference in the Chief Medical Examiner's office don't cut it, Mr. Speaker. The courageous challenge of Dr. Anny Sauvageau, resulting in her loss of a job, is yet another example of a failure of accountability in this government for full and transparent review of unnatural deaths.

Make no mistake, hon. members; there's much work to be done. Violence against women, both active violence and passive withholding of essential human needs, remains. It must be brought to light. It must be prevented and eliminated. It's our responsibility as legislators, men and women, to achieve this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, question period will follow after the next two comments. Let us begin with the leader of the ND opposition.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Saturday marked the 25th anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre. It's a day that is, sadly, etched in the memory of our nation, a day when 14 bright engineering students were killed because they were women.

Today, along with the NDP caucus, I remember those 14 women and the tragedy of their violent deaths. However, Mr. Speaker, today we also take the opportunity to commit once again to taking real action to end violence against women in this province.

The White Ribbon campaign, designed to remind all of the obligation to end violence against women and designed in particular to remind men of their obligation to end violence against women, is an important campaign. The late Jack Layton, former leader of Canada's NDP, was one of the cofounders of this campaign, and I am proud of that. But women in this province continue to face physical and sexual violence. In fact, as has been mentioned, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters says that more than 17,000 women were turned away from shelters this year.

Today we also acknowledge the systemic violence towards indigenous women, 1,200 of whom have been killed or have gone missing over the past 30 years. The Alberta NDP believes that a full public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women is required to get to the bottom of this systemic violence that women from indigenous communities continue to face. I have called upon the Premier to join us in this call.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Assembly for taking the time to reflect on the anniversary of the Polytechnique massacre, and I'd like to call on all members of the Assembly to take today as an opportunity to commit, once again, to ending all violence against women.

Finally, I'd also like to encourage all members of the Assembly to take the opportunity to reflect on the occasion by viewing the work of Edmonton artist Carla Costuros. Her piece entitled *Mary's Daughter* is currently displayed in the rotunda to mark the anniversary of the massacre at l'école Polytechnique.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've just heard from the hon. minister, today we remember the 14 young women viciously attacked and murdered on December 6, 1989.

Mr. Speaker, these women had a fundamental right to pursue their studies in a traditionally male-dominated field, and they were targeted for it. Because of this heinous act of violence, we will never know the brilliance they would have contributed to the field of engineering throughout their careers, nor could we expect their families to ever truly feel complete.

It is our human duty to never forget this act of violence towards women nor forget any other as this would mean that their passing was in vain. We still see far too many instances of this sort of violence today, not only abroad but here in Canada and Alberta. It is imperative that we take responsibility, that we speak up when we witness violence, that we make it clear beyond all doubt that these acts will not be tolerated on any scale so that one day we might end them for good.

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

### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, you're reminded: 35 seconds maximum for each question, 35 seconds maximum for each answer.

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

### Oil Price Forecasting

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, oil prices continue to fall, and it appears that not everyone is on the same page about what that means for Alberta. An example of that is the discrepancy between the Finance minister and the Premier about what oil projections are and what the Premier has said that they're going to be. The Finance minister has stuck to his guns, saying that oil would average \$75 for the rest of the year. The Premier has said otherwise. Did the Premier misspeak when he told the Calgary Chamber of Commerce that he expects oil to range between \$65 and \$75?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. Certainly, oil prices appear to be in the range of \$65 to \$75 per barrel. No one knows for certain because this is obviously an inexact science. Certainly, no Premier of Alberta or Prime Minister of Canada, for that matter, has control over international oil prices.

What these circumstances do demand on the part of the government of Alberta is to control what we can control, and that is our public finances, to be prudent, to be cautious, to be disciplined, and ensure that we have control on the expenditure side of the government, which this Minister of Finance is doing.

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, they can't both be right. For the record I do think the Premier was right. At least, I hope he was because today oil dipped below \$65. Morgan Stanley says that Brent could average \$53 next year and dip as low as \$43. Regardless, basic math says that if oil spends the rest of the year below \$75, then it can't also average \$75. Now you know why we're opposed to all that fuzzy math. Why is it that the Premier is letting the Finance minister build a fiscal outlook on an oil price that the Premier knows is wrong?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, I thank the hon. member for her question. I can assure the House that the Finance minister is building both this budget and the next budget on sound, conservative fiscal principles and on the most realistic projections of oil prices which



are possible, which at this point appear, by the reckoning of most commentators, to be in the range of \$65 to \$75 per barrel. This clearly has an implication on our province in terms of our finances. This province last year produced close to 2.6 million barrels of oil per day. We'll be cautious and disciplined as we move forward.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, it is this budget year that we're concerned about because this discrepancy between the Finance minister and the Premier is important, and it's significant. Every dollar drop in the average oil price results in about 200 million fewer dollars in the government's coffers over a year. A \$5 difference has a billion-dollar impact. If the Premier's projections are right and the Finance minister's projections are wrong, they will be short by hundreds of millions of dollars this year. Will the Premier order the Finance minister to do a revised fiscal update using more realistic numbers?

2:00

**Mr. Campbell:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when I talked about \$75 a barrel oil, that was the second-quarter update. We'll be coming out with a third-quarter update. Oil right now is at about \$63.28, which is going to make things interesting for us over the next little while. As a government we're committed to bringing in sound, conservative fiscal principles, and we'll do everything we can to make sure that core services and Albertans are looked after.

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the Finance minister is watching those numbers as closely as we are.

#### Rural Health Facility Utilization

**Ms Smith:** Last week the *Edmonton Journal* highlighted how this government has failed to maintain and properly utilize Alberta's hospitals. While we don't agree with the reporter's conclusion to close rural hospitals, it is very clear that the government should use the extra capacity to take pressure off urban hospitals. For instance, my hometown of High River has an effective, full-service hospital, that performs about half of the hernia operations in the Calgary region. Why won't this government use our rural hospitals to make Alberta's health system work better?

**Mr. Mandel:** Mr. Speaker, this government, this Premier in the initial stages set out to look at rural hospitals and what they can do and the contributions they can make by setting up a rural health strategy. That report is coming out. We'll look at that as it comes out in the next couple of weeks, and we will take some steps according to that.

**Ms Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example. Last year I visited a small-town hospital which uses one of its operating rooms for storage. Now, this hospital is just a 90-minute drive away from here. Surely Alberta Health Services could relocate elective procedures to small hospitals close to our big cities and use the new capacity in our big hospitals to make progress on wait times for more serious procedures. Alberta is missing its key wait time targets in nearly everything. Why won't the Health minister look at better using our rural hospitals to improve the system?

**Mr. Mandel:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. We are looking at wait times. Wait times aren't as simple as using a hospital here or a hospital there. They're a matter of capacity, of dollars that we are able to invest in the system, and the time we need in order to implement those changes. We're looking at that now. We'll be coming out with some ideas on change in the next

little while, which we hope will expedite some of the processes for some of the delayed surgeries.

**Ms Smith:** Mr. Speaker, all this government wants to do is study. They never want to make decisions.

This government and AHS's centralizing bureaucracy constantly reject ideas which would improve the health system. Let me give you an example. An example of this failure to embrace an innovative proposal is from the Newell Foundation. This novel proposal is to build a life-lease facility in Bassano that would include innovative continuing care, long-term care nursing beds, and a small acute-care hospital. It's a very good idea. It's being offered to the government at virtually no cost. Why does the government constantly drag its feet on these kinds of health care innovations?

**Mr. Mandel:** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate that question. I've had an opportunity to meet with the Newell Foundation and the Bassano community. We're moving forward with that. It's a great idea. We look forward to working with them to bring that to fruition.

**The Speaker:** Next question, hon. leader.

**Ms Smith:** A good answer for a change, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Health minister.

#### Government Effectiveness

**Ms Smith:** The Premier has said that Albertans should judge his government on its progress, so let's ask some progress questions. On September 16 the Premier promised to sell Alberta's air fleet. Now, Albertans may think that we are out of the government aircraft business, but the planes have continued to fly senior members of the civil service around. Since the announcement there have been more than 40 flights. To the Premier: when can we expect the government air fleet to actually be sold, or has the Premier changed his mind about getting rid of it?

**Mr. Prentice:** I can assure the hon. member that the Premier has not changed his mind on that matter. This is a province under new management. We are listening to Albertans. We heard that Albertans do not want the government of Alberta operating an airline. I have never set foot on one of the government aircraft personally, Mr. Speaker, and our government ministers and political staff since September 15 have been flying commercial and driving as an alternative. I understand that there have been flights. The LG has used aircraft, and from time to time the shuttle service between Edmonton and Calgary has been used for officials.

**Ms Smith:** That wasn't a clear "We're selling the planes" answer, so maybe I'll have to ask that one again, Mr. Speaker.

Also during the by-election the Education minister announced on his campaign website that he was approving new modulars for William Reid school. Now, leaving aside the propriety of that announcement since it's being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner, the parents at William Reid would like to know the progress on that promise. During the floods the government showed it was able to build and install modulars at some school sites in less than three months. Can the Education minister tell us if William Reid school can expect to get their portables by February, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Dirks:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly take seriously our responsibility to ensure that we have adequate capacity in our schools to respond to growing utilization. William Reid is one of those circumstances. I believe that the utilization rate there was well over a hundred per cent. We've made a commitment to provide modulars there and in other school jurisdictions as well, in the city of Calgary and across the province, and those will arrive in a timely way to ensure that all children will have adequate capacity to be educated in our schools.

**Ms Smith:** That doesn't sound like a yes either, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure when we're going to see those modulars installed.

Another progress question. On September 19 the Premier announced that Michener Centre would not be closed and that its residents could live out their lives there. What has not been made clear is if any of the 46 Michener residents who had been forced out would be allowed to return. We know that at least five of them have died since being forced out. We also know that for many of these residents Michener is the only home they've ever known. Can the Human Services minister tell us whether these Michener Centre residents will be allowed to return home, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, just to encapsulate this exchange, Albertans will see what they've asked for, which is more portables, no airplanes owned by the government, and that the residents of Michener Centre who have left have been invited back and have been welcomed back. The minister can certainly provide the details of the exact numbers. I'm not current on the most recent numbers, but I do know that people who had left Michener have returned, have been welcomed back, and are satisfied with what this government has done to protect them.

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

#### Gay-straight Alliances in Schools

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, plain and simple. Alberta Liberals want equal rights for all, but the PCs proposed a state-sanctioned segregation law which would have created different classes of citizens based solely on their sexual identity. In trying to defend this atrocity, the Premier simply said that rights are not absolute. To the Premier: what rights of school children does the Premier not support and want to limit?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said previously in this House that there is no room for intolerance in our education system, that we support a safe, dignified learning environment, a learning environment that is respectful of all students. That is our aspiration. As I indicated last week, Bill 10 has been paused, and we will consult and hear from Albertans their views on this, and I stand by that decision. It's an important decision, and that's exactly how we intend to deal with this.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he wants to put the whole process on pause – and you heard him right here – while he takes more time to consult. Well, we can tell you that not accommodating all requests for GSAs is unacceptable to the LGBTQ community and many Albertans. Even the president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association says that their boards will follow the law the province ultimately brings forward.

To the Premier: will you now have the political courage to do the right thing and make GSAs a reality in every school where students request them?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, we will all follow the law, and we all intend to live up to the provisions of the Charter and the Alberta Constitution and fulfill the obligations that we all have to our children. In the days ahead there will be an important conversation with people in this province, and that will include people from the LGBTQ community, it will include people from the school boards which the hon. member has referred to, and it will include other Albertans who have a point of view on this matter.

**Dr. Sherman:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative record is clear, dragging their feet until the courts force them to do the right thing. The fact is that LGBTQ students have a constitutional right to be free from the sort of discrimination that allows other students to form clubs but not them. Bill 202 would have automatically provided safe and inclusive schools to all students. The Premier said that Bill 202 was divisive, but how can he say that when he never even allowed it to come in the Legislature for debate? To the Premier: will you withdraw Bill 10 and allow Bill 202 to get the debate it rightly deserves right now in the Legislature?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, I heard in the clearest of terms from Albertans over the course of the last week that they wish to see further discussion. They wish to be heard with respect to the issues that are contained in Bill 202 or in Bill 10. That's precisely the reason that the bill was put on hold and why it's not been brought back to this Legislative Assembly. We stand by that decision. This is an important matter. We intend to get it right. We intend to hear from and listen to Albertans.

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

2:10

#### Women's Shelters

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day hundreds of Alberta women gather the courage to flee the abusive situations they are facing at home: they pack a bag, they gather their children, and they seek refuge at an emergency shelter. But the latest data shows that in total these brave women were turned away 17,000 times because the shelters were full. To the Premier: what does this say about our province when on 17,000 occasions women fleeing these dangerous situations can find neither shelter nor support?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Human Services.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal is to ensure that women and children get the help they need when they it. We know that if shelters are full for the evening, the support that's provided for emergency accommodation in a hotel room and the wraparound workers that we have to support the families are absolutely critical. As well, emergency protection orders have to be issued. We know those are very important. Unfortunately, in the last eight months we've had to issue to 900 women protection orders for their situations.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that doesn't answer my question at all, and I'm pretty sure that wasn't the Premier.

In the last few years rent in Alberta has skyrocketed while vacancy rates have dropped to 1 per cent in major cities. At the

same time the number of women and children accepted into shelters has actually gone down because those few who do find refuge can't find anywhere else to go, so they stay longer. Again to the Premier: why is your government neglecting vulnerable Alberta families by failing to ensure that there is genuinely affordable housing available for those who so desperately need it?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows full well, we support the 30 women's emergency shelters as well as the second-stage shelters. We know that there is a need for affordable housing and for women and families to get into the homes quicker and not to stay in the shelters as long because that's a temporary solution. It goes back to the housing first solution, that we need to work on, and I look forward to working with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, just trying to figure out exactly the numbers we're working with so we can solve this problem together.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned that this does not appear to be a priority for the Premier. Now, his minister – his minister – has said that his government is finding a place for families who are turned away from emergency shelters by putting them in hotels. To the Premier: if this is a priority for you and you're prepared to answer it, do you truly believe that stuffing vulnerable families into a motel on the edge of town provides the necessary security and support that these women and these children need at such a fragile time in their lives?

**Mr. Prentice:** Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, this is a matter of concern to all Albertans, it's a concern to the hon. member, and it's a concern, I would assume, to every single person in this House. We need to protect women and their vulnerable children in these circumstances. We all know that. We do, as the minister pointed at, support the network of women's shelters in this province. We are working with the Council of Women's Shelters to improve the situation, and it's why we support things such as the White Ribbon campaign and, the week before last, the Moosehide campaign. This clearly matters to the government. We are dealing with it. These are challenging circumstances, and we all need to do the best that we can.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

### Energy Policies

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in a belt-tightening mode. Clearly, the drop in oil prices means that there will be some difficult budget decisions ahead. Given that resource-dependent countries such as Norway, Mexico, and several Middle Eastern countries routinely hedge their annual royalties as a way to manage market risk, why doesn't this government adopt a risk management policy to hedge and lock in some or all of our expected royalties?

**Mr. Campbell:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Again, I hear a lot about Mexico; I hear a lot about Norway. I think it's important to understand that, you know, right now in today's economy there's no place you'd want to be other than Alberta. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada that can weather this storm. Moody's came out last week about our triple-A rating, saying that even if oil hits \$60 a barrel, this jurisdiction will weather the storm. When I look at Norway, you know, it's a

country; we're a province. I think that we'll be in good shape moving forward.

**Mr. Anglin:** I think you hedged your answer on that one.

Given that Alberta has deregulated its electricity market to pave the way for a free-trading market, why have regulatory costs rocketed from \$13 million to \$137 million annually since deregulation, and what is being done to control these out-of-control regulatory costs?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'd have to question the premise of that question. I think he's probably talking about the full regulatory system, not the regulation of the deregulated electrical generation market. The costs are open. The regulatory process is very clear. We're watching the costs all the time.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Canada's risk-free rate of return is below 1 per cent, given that the two-year bond nominal yield is below 1 per cent and that the 10-year bond nominal yield is below 2 and a half per cent, why do Alberta's regulated utilities receive a guaranteed rate of return of 9 per cent, and what risk are they undertaking to deserve such a lucrative guaranteed rate of return?

**Mr. Oberle:** Actually, they don't, Mr. Speaker. The member is mistaken in that. The companies receive a rate of return dependent on how good they are at managing their business, and it's not guaranteed to be 9 per cent.

### MLAs' Nominations as Federal Election Candidates

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Justice, who is responsible for elections legislation in the province. Public service is a privilege, and we're all familiar with the old adage that a person cannot serve two masters. Can the minister explain what Alberta's policy is regarding members of this House standing as federal parliamentary candidates while continuing to hold provincial office?

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, this is crossing over into another jurisdiction, but if you have an answer you'd like to give, let's hear it.

**Mr. Denis:** Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker. There's not a specific regulation in our elections laws, but there is a regulation under section 65 of the Canada Elections Act, which makes it clear that an MLA in a province is not eligible to be a candidate in a federal election. Just in common terms, what that would mean is that once a federal election is called and if a person here was signing off to become a candidate for whichever party in whichever district, what would happen is that that person would have to resign here under the federal law.

**Dr. Brown:** To the same minister: the former Member for Calgary-Foothills did the honourable thing and stepped aside when he got the nomination, but since the law does not require such a thing, are we relying on the individual ethics and judgment of individual members in the House?

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, we're treading into an area here that is really beyond the jurisdiction cited, in particular asking for legal opinions. That is also something that is dicing on the side of a dangerous precedent here. I'll allow one more answer here.

**Mr. Denis:** What I would indicate, Mr. Speaker, is that the former Member for Calgary-Foothills, a gentleman named Len Webber, became the federal candidate, and he resigned immediately. I think he did the honourable thing. There was a by-election called, and subsequent to that, we did receive a very good member from Calgary-Foothills to replace him.

**The Speaker:** Do you wish to try again, hon. member?

**Dr. Brown:** Would the minister consider bringing forth legislation to ensure that MLAs are working full-time for the interests of Albertans?

**The Speaker:** Briefly, hon. minister.

**Mr. Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I have no plans to change the legislation at this time, but I would encourage Albertans who are concerned about MLAs moonlighting for other political parties to maybe give them a call. Albertans are our bosses. They deserve our one hundred per cent, undivided attention every day.

**The Speaker:** I may choose to comment on this at another time.

Let us move on to Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

### Rural Hospitals

**Mr. Stier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, rural hospitals are a key component of the overall structure of smaller communities across Alberta. Not only do they ensure the health of these communities, but they also create jobs and inspiration for young people to lay down roots and live in our remote communities. To the Infrastructure minister: will your government's new approach to rural health care infrastructure mean that large areas will be dark and bare of local and regional health care and emergency services?

2:20

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We had an intensive discussion last week, in this Chamber actually, about the facility condition index and the status of our rural hospitals in particular. We're committed to ensuring that our hospitals are in great shape. We have over \$222 million committed in our current capital plan to catch up on the maintenance in our hospitals, and we'll continue to invest to ensure that they're safe and secure for Albertans.

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Stier:** Thank you. This government's front bench continues to provide no real answers on the plight of rural hospitals. Clearly, they have been well coached, but Albertans deserve to know what exactly is going on. Given that we've heard a lot of responses to questions about health care infrastructure particularly or platitudes and generalizations like, "This government is always looking after the health interests of Albertans," I'm going to give the Minister of Health a chance to be perfectly clear. Are you going to close rural hospitals? Yes or no, sir?

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

**Mr. Mandel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta is incredibly important to this government. One of the Premier's first steps was to create a rural health care strategy, which we're moving forward

on. That will give us some direction on how we can better support our rural hospitals and our rural communities.

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

**Mr. Stier:** Yes. Thank you. Well, Minister of Health, you wrote a column for the *Edmonton Journal*, published on December 6, that outlined this government's approach to health care infrastructure, but in it you only talked about large urban centres like Edmonton and Calgary. Once again to the Health minister: will you set the record straight by committing today to the support of rural hospitals and ensuring that these crucial rural facilities remain an integral part of the regional health care framework?

**Mr. Mandel:** Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to every hospital in this province. We'll continue to work with every community to try to make sure they have the kind of health care within their community and around their community that they can be proud of. We'll continue to do that. This Premier has given us direction to do that. Maintenance is an important part of what we do. We'll continue with that approach.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Calgary-Buffero.

### Animal Disease Prevention and Surveillance

**Dr. Starke:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Disease prevention and surveillance is just as important in animal health as it is in human health. Thanks to the co-operative efforts of producers, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Alberta Agriculture, and my veterinary colleagues our province is free of a number of diseases that cost millions to other jurisdictions. It is a proud record but one that requires constant vigilance. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: with the recent diagnosis of a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza on poultry farms in B.C., can the minister assure Albertan poultry producers that specific measures are being taken to prevent this disease?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. Yes, I'm sure we've all seen on the news that there is an outbreak of avian influenza in the lower mainland of B.C. Five farms have been affected. They've all been quarantined by the CFIA. Our provincial veterinarian, Dr. Hauer, and his staff are monitoring this very closely. They do have an action plan in place. I should say that I've visited that centre several times when they've been just doing trial runs, and these are people that are very committed to their job and very ready.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Avian influenza is only one potentially devastating condition. Our hog industry currently faces the threat of porcine epidemic diarrhea, or PED. Given that this disease has been recently diagnosed in Ontario, Quebec, and Montana and that the virus has been detected in Alberta off-farm, are additional educational and biosecurity measures being taken to prevent this devastating disease from being established in Alberta, or are hog producers going to be left on their own to deal with the devastating consequences, like they were with the H1N1 outbreak of 2009?

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

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the question is that, yes, steps are being taken. I should mention that both in the case of the avian influenza and in the case of PED, which involves pigs, we're working very closely with industry. It's not that industry is sitting on the sidelines. They are fully engaged in this, and in this particular case it was an industry initiative, a random check, that found the PED bacteria in an office. It has not involved any animals in Alberta, but that just shows you the extent of the surveillance. We jumped right at it, and they've taken extended measures now.

**Dr. Starke:** Well, finally, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Without question, the most economically devastating animal disease to affect our province in this century has been bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE. A lot of work was done to reopen markets, but it took years of effort and lots of testing. Now the World Organisation for Animal Health currently lists Canada among countries with controlled BSE risk status. What, if anything, is your department doing to maintain that status or, better yet, to move us into the more favourable category of negligible risk like the U.S.A.?

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

**Mr. Olson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is something that we are watching and working on very carefully. It is true that the BSE epidemic was devastating for our industry, but one of the things that evolved from it was enhanced traceability, a much greater awareness in terms of industry, governments, and the public. I would say that we're much better prepared now to deal with these types of situations. In 2015 we can apply to the World Organisation for Animal Health – the acronym is OIE – for a risk-free status, so we're hoping to do that then.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

#### Faith-based and Private Schools

**Mr. Hehr:** Last week this government failed when it refused to allow gay-straight alliances in all schools where kids want them. Last spring the Heritage Christian academy and the Prairie Christian academy, both fully funded public schools, required students and staff to sign an agreement stating that they would not engage in homosexual behaviour. To date neither this government nor these schools have made public the wording of their new document that may try to regulate student and staff morality. To the Minister of Education: can the minister tell us whether or not students and staff at these schools are still required to sign this morality agreement?

**Mr. Dirks:** Mr. Speaker, I can say that we expect that all school boards, all jurisdictions that are under the authority of this government will ensure that they are operating within the legal framework that is required by our Canadian Constitution and by the laws of this province.

**Mr. Hehr:** That doesn't sound like much of an answer.

Recently a private school, the Green Learning Foundation, went bankrupt. In an act that can only be described as complete and utter incompetence, this government forwarded money to this school when it was in financial disarray. As a result, families were left without money to be used for their kids' education. What has the minister done to rectify the situation, and what steps has he taken to ensure that this does not continue?

**Mr. Dirks:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this certainly was a stressful situation for the students and the families concerned, and we want to ensure, of course, that the students continue to have a good education wherever they will be. I understand this matter is in bankruptcy proceedings, and we will wait to determine what the outcomes of that will be.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, that doesn't sound like too much.

The troubling fact is that 69 private schools have gone out of business in the last five years. While this government compels all public school boards in this province to make available their financial information by posting it online or on the ministry website, why aren't private schools required to do the same when they receive public money? Are parents not entitled to know this information?

**Mr. Dirks:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that a number of private schools have closed. They normally close because enrolments drop, and they simply cannot sustain their particular operations. We ensure that all schools in the province, whether they are public or private, meet our financial disclosure obligations, that they go through the appropriate auditing processes, and that I and my officials are satisfied that public funds are being spent appropriately on the education of children.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

#### Postsecondary Education Funding

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. While running to replace a Premier who had broken her promise to adequately fund postsecondary education, this Premier promised to restore all funding that was cut from our province's institutions. Despite these promises, his minister for advanced education has suggested that more cuts will be coming to our institutions rather than restoring the funding the Premier promised. To the Premier: will the Premier's promise to keep the promise that was broken again be broken, or will he keep his promise to keep the promise that was broken?

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

**Mr. Scott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to put some facts on the table. First of all, no budget decisions have been made yet. What I can tell you is that Alberta invests in our students. Our latest numbers show that Alberta has the third-highest expenditures per full-time student in all of Canada. Campus Alberta is very well funded. This year we invested \$2.1 billion among our postsecondary institutions.

2:30

**The Speaker:** First supplemental.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this government's negligence has forced universities and colleges to turn to student fees as a financial alternative and given that recent proposals for market modifiers by several institutions will gouge students and place many professional careers out of reach of kids from families of modest means, to the minister of advanced education: will you assure potential students from working- and middle-class families that their futures will not be snatched away from them because of underfunding of postsecondary education by this government, and if not, why not?

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

**Mr. Scott:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Let's put some facts on the table again for that member. Accessibility is a priority for our government, and I'm proud of our record. We invest \$234 million in student aid supports. That includes scholarships, bursaries, and grants. In addition, we make \$408 million available for student loans. Any Albertan who qualifies for a student loan gets a student loan. Our graduates are very successful, and they're successful at paying back their student loans. We expect that 90 per cent of student loans that are issued this year will be paid back.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister would like some facts, I want to ask him if he's aware that this province cancelled the remission program a number of years ago, leading to some of the highest student debt in the country and the lowest participation in postsecondary attendance of any province in Canada. Our postsecondary institutions are running big deficits. Given the importance of education to Albertans, can he look Albertans in the eye and tell them that his government will ensure that there are no further cuts to postsecondary education?

**Mr. Scott:** Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you is that there have been no budget decisions made at this time yet. We're still going through the process. What I can tell you is that we're going to continue investing in our postsecondary institutions. I can tell you that we're going to continue making sure that young people have access to their postsecondary institutions. We're going to continue investing so that our students get the best education.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky-View, followed by Lethbridge-West.

### Education Curriculum

**Mr. McAllister:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few years ago the government launched a bold new initiative called Inspiring Education. The goal, as stated in the document, is to completely transform education. In other words, they want to change what kids learn, and they want to change how kids learn. While there are terrific initiatives under way at the local level, a lot of people find the government's new initiative – shall we say? – less than inspiring. To the minister. Your government is under new management. How will that affect what you do or don't do with Inspiring Education?

**Mr. Dirks:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Inspiring Education was the product of many months of hundreds, indeed thousands of conversations that took place across the province with Albertans regarding the future of their education system. There is much in that particular document that is indeed inspiring. It is a visionary, inspirational, and directional document that helps provide guidance for where we go in the future. Does that mean that education is going to go through a revolution? Of course not. We have a wonderful education system. We're going to continue to ensure that it's top-drawer for our students.

**Mr. McAllister:** Well, that clears things up.

In 2008 the government changed math textbooks in the province to line up with the new fad, discovery-based or inquiry-based learning. Not coincidentally, the publisher of this textbook, *Math Makes Sense*, also sits on the curriculum-development team with

the province. That's a conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: will you provide another resource for math instruction to teachers that focuses on direct instruction and includes things such as standard algorithms so that we have a better balance for our students in the classroom?

**Mr. Dirks:** Well, Mr. Speaker, once upon a time in a former life I was a teacher and a school principal and a chair of a board of education in this province, and I understand that there are many ways to accomplish the goals of education. There are many pedagogies that work. Direct instruction is one. Inquiry education is another. If anybody thinks that there's only one best way to go about teaching, they're mistaken. So we will ensure that we have a curriculum – and I will sign off on that at some point in time – that is going to be the very best for our students going forward into the 21st century, focusing on basics and focusing on 21st century skills.

**Mr. McAllister:** I'm sure the minister's office smells of rich mahogany, too, but it doesn't answer the questions we're asking.

I'll give you another opportunity to prove you're under new management. Minister, I had to beg, plead, pretty much embarrass the former Education minister to meet with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies, who represents tens of thousands of Alberta parents who have concerns with what's going on in the classroom. She is supported by a team of highly qualified expert mathematicians. Minister, will you agree to meet with Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies and her team, not your department officials but you personally, sir?

**Mr. Dirks:** Mr. Speaker, I just indicated that we are committed to building and maintaining and strengthening an education system that will do the very best to provide our students with 21st century skills learning and also basics in literacy and in numeracy, the kinds of things that all of us would want our children to be successful at. In that process there are many people who are engaged in speaking to the curriculum-design process. We will continue that. Many voices will be heard, and we will have an excellent curriculum for the 21st century.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

### Workforce Supply

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend we had the privilege of having our Premier down in southern Alberta to visit with many rural and urban constituents, and while I was there having a chance to hear from these folks, I heard one consistent theme. There is a great deal of concern about the temporary foreign worker program and the Alberta immigrant nominee program. We have people being sent home that are valued employees that are helping to keep rural and urban businesses alike going, and while they're doing that, we're losing employees. So I'm going to ask the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what are you doing about this backlog in the nominee program?

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

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a question that I've heard from the hon. member's constituents, too. The fact of the matter is that we have no backlog in Alberta. Alberta is limited by the federal government to a maximum of 5,500 certificates each calendar year for AINP, and as of last week we have issued

all 5,500 of those certificates for this year. We have worked and will continue to work with the federal government to find long-term solutions to better respond to Alberta's labour demand.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As these workers are being sent home, we have businesses that are struggling to meet the needs. They're closing early, and they're reducing their hours. What is the ministry doing to support those businesses that are facing these challenges and having to reduce their hours of operation?

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

**Mr. McIver:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member must be taking the same phone calls I am, once again. The government's priority always has been and still is that Albertans and Canadians get the jobs available first. We recognize the difficulties that some businesses are experiencing in finding permanent personnel for those permanent jobs. Our government has strategies in place to support employers in recruiting and retaining the workforce. We also support initiatives to help Albertans gain the skills and training they need to fill the available jobs. Despite these initiatives we expect to be 96,000 workers short by 2023.

**The Speaker:** Final supplemental.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just heard the minister say that he's hoping to see Albertans fill these vacancies. So I'd ask the minister this question, then: what is he doing to make sure that these Albertans are trained and ready to go to work in these jobs and businesses?

**Mr. McIver:** Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, through my colleagues the ministers of Education and Advanced Education there are a lot of programs. We also work with the federal government on the Canada-Alberta job grant, which shares the responsibility for training people between the government and business, thereby involving business in doing this, too. It's a team effort. We also have to get involved. We also are working to help underrepresented groups participate more fully in the labour market through the First Nations training programs. We continue to work with employers and the industry associations on a constant basis, but it's a big job.

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

### **Women's Shelters** (continued)

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The social supports for women fleeing violence in this province are inadequate. According to recent reports over 17,000 women were turned away from emergency shelters last year. That's 2,000 more than the year before, and it's enough to fill Rexall Place. This is a troubling statistic made worse by the fact that these women are being turned away at a critical time, when they are most concerned about their own personal safety and the safety of their children. To the Minister of Human Services: why is your government denying support to thousands of vulnerable women every year?

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Human Services.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd first like to thank the hon. member for his powerful statement on the 25th anniversary of l'École Polytechnique.

We know the work we have to do. As I indicated earlier, shelters are just one part of the equation. It's about increased supports to women in violence with front-line workers and first responders such as police. We work with them to help them with their immediate safety and needs, but again it's temporary, and we're looking at the housing first model as much as we can.

**Mr. Wilson:** Last year I raised the issue of unfunded capacity existing in our emergency shelters, and in response the province allocated funding for an additional 70 spaces in the system. Minister, is there additional capacity in our shelters today, over and above these 70 spaces, to do more if the funding was made available, and will you be advocating for that in your budget this year?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we did allocate 70 more shelter beds last budget for a total of 710 beds. One of the other areas we allocated funds for was shelter enhancement, which was about \$260,000 across Alberta for shelters to use funds for extra expenses. That's been very successful. With respect to maintenance there are some agencies that have funded that in Calgary. We know that it's important to have these available and to have the conversations with the shelters to meet their needs.

**Mr. Wilson:** The additional spaces are a start, Mr. Speaker. We all recognize that this is a multifaceted and complex problem with no simple solutions. When a woman makes the choice to seek help, which requires a huge leap of faith in our social system, and our collective response is to send them right back into the violence they are attempting to flee, we are failing them, Minister. This is not a new problem. What are you going to do about it?

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Again, Mr. Speaker, as I've said previously, we know that women are reaching out for help, and that's contacting the family information line as well, which I said is available in 170 languages. I'm looking forward to working with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to ensure that we have a consistent way to collect data to see exactly how many women and children we're able to help. I know that sometimes women may contact a shelter by phone before they decide to leave a tragic situation. I can assure you that Human Services and this government are working very hard to support women and families.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Riverview.

### **Edmonton River Valley Park System**

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Edmonton is known for its parks and trails. My constituency of Edmonton-McClung contains many of these parks and trails as it is bordered by the North Saskatchewan River. In the First Session of this Legislature I proposed a motion for the government to continue its commitment to the creation of a world-class capital region river valley park by working with the city of Edmonton to connect all of the river valley parks into a single, continuous, and protected park. My question to the minister of the environment and sustainable resources: how . . .

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** Can you guess what his question was going to be?

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, I can imagine because I've sat with this member and I know how very passionate he is about the river valley in Edmonton, so I want to thank him for his passion.

Mr. Speaker, the goal and the vision of the River Valley Alliance is to create North America's largest river valley park system for the enjoyment of all Albertans. I'm happy to say that to date a number of projects have been completed in support of the river valley park system, including the Fort Edmonton Footbridge, Voyager park in my constituency of Devon, and also in Fort Saskatchewan and many others. Funding is being utilized, and projects are . . .

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

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you to the minister for the compliment.

My supplementary question to the same minister: how have Albertans benefited from the river valley initiative since that time, and how have you improved access and connectivity in the river valley area?

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The end result of this project is to create an almost 80-kilometre river valley park system for all Albertans to access and to use. Every time one of our partner communities completes a project, we get closer to our goal, and each completed individual project adds value and creates new opportunities: a vibrant stretch of trail connecting seven municipal communities along the river valley, complete with parks, trailheads, facilities, docks and boat launches, pedestrian bridges, and so much more.

**Mr. Xiao:** To the same minister: how will your department ensure our parks and trails in the river valley are preserved and sustained for future generations?

**Mrs. McQueen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this project is about creating, protecting, and preserving a capital region river valley park system. Alberta Parks staff are working with our municipal partners to develop a conceptual plan for facility development and recreational opportunities within this system. With \$50 million invested in this project by the province, we have a vested interest to continuing to work with our partners on the completion of this important and unique urban park system.

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

### Service and Rescue Dogs

**Mr. Young:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not every business in Alberta is complying with the provincial legislation that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities who use service dogs. A recent survey shows that Alberta's cities treat service dogs and their owners poorly, turning them away from public places like restaurants and grocery stores even though their rights are protected. This includes many of my constituents. Laws and obligations are one thing, but ensuring compliance is another. All of my questions are to the Associate Minister of Persons with

Disabilities. Minister, why aren't you standing up for disabled Albertans and their service dogs?

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. associate minister to respond.

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know how important it is for Albertans with disabilities to use dogs and have access. People with a qualified service dog and a team can go anywhere you and I can. Failing to do that, there is a fine of up to \$3,000. We're working on a very aggressive public awareness campaign to make sure that all businesses are aware of this. Of course, if someone does not comply with this, it is a provincial law, and you can report it to the police.

**Mr. Young:** There are those who can't access service dogs that they need trained. There is a huge demand that is not being met and that impacts Albertans' ability to live a high-quality life with the supports they need. Why are you denying Albertans the right to live these high-quality lives, and what are you doing to support these service dogs?

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to making sure that every Albertan has the best quality of life. In terms of the service dogs we absolutely know that it's important for the individual to have access with their service dogs. In terms of the shortage we're currently working on some regulatory changes so that owner-trained dogs can also be tested under ADI standards, without compromising public safety, to make sure that people can have access to service dogs and can enjoy their quality of life.

**Mr. Young:** Emergency search and rescue dogs and their handlers are invaluable in emergency disaster situations. Will the minister extend the provision of service dogs to emergency service and rescue dogs that are deployed to an emergency?

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're absolutely grateful for the service that both service dogs and rescue dogs provide, and I'm quite thankful for the hon. member's passion in terms of the search dogs and guide dogs. As the hon. member is aware, they go through rigorous training. Search and rescue dogs and guide and service dogs have different training to make sure that we're meeting the needs of Albertans. A law protects the rights of persons with disabilities, and of course it's about allowing access to individuals to go to public . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, the bell sounding the end of question period has rung. Just before we have a 30-second pause here, could I have unanimous consent, should you wish to give it, to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

### Introduction of Guests

*(continued)*

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. A brief introduction.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly



three individuals who have joined us to watch second reading of Bill 203. Seated in the members' gallery we have Mr. Paul Whittaker, the president and CEO of Alberta Forest Products. Many of you can remember Paul from his time as Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs. Seated with him is Mr. Brock Mulligan, director of communications with the AFPA. Brock was previously my CPC assistant and was a true asset to this government for five years. With them is Rory Koska, technical advisor with Wood Works! Alberta. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will resume with the next order of our Routine.

## 2:50 Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Edmonton Food Bank Donation by Sikh Community

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate and thank the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee and members of the Sikh community of Edmonton, who are also part of my riding of Edmonton-Manning, for their generous support to raise donations to donate to Edmonton's Food Bank this year.

Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of the annual celebration of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee contributed to Edmonton's Food Bank with \$13,000 and 7,500 pounds of food as well as \$40,000 to the University of Alberta. In addition, with combined and driving efforts the Punjabi Media Association and the Sikh community were also able to donate \$65,000 and 4 tonnes of food.

One of the important teachings of Sikhism is sharing with those in need so that no one goes to bed hungry. Over the past three years the Sikh community in Edmonton has donated over \$200,000 to Edmonton's Food Bank. The Nagar Kirtan Committee and the Punjabi Media Association have for many years now made great efforts to reach out to the community for donation appeals through radio, print media, and TV programs in order to help in the efforts to provide support where it is needed.

I praise and salute the efforts of the Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan Committee, the Punjabi Media Association, and the Sikh community for their kind donations and for giving back to the community by helping those in need this holiday season. I encourage all of us and every Albertan to donate this holiday season. God bless Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

### Official Opposition Policies

**Mr. Bikman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you believe in shorter wait times for hospital surgeries, you just might be a Wildroser. If you believe prioritized public lists for infrastructure construction would prevent politicized decisions and reduce waste, then you just might be a Wildroser. If you wish the government had been putting half its surpluses into the heritage savings trust fund, you just might be a Wildroser. If you believe the interest on what should be a \$200 billion heritage savings trust fund would provide a nice cushion during times of lower royalty revenues, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think government, like baby diapers,

should be changed regularly and for the same reasons, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think one of the three great lies is, "Hi, I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you," you just might be a Wildroser. See me later to find out what I think the other two lies are.

If you think paying 1 and one half billion dollars for a structure that was quoted at \$500 million is unacceptable, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think that AHS would collapse if it weren't for the skill and dedication of front-line service providers, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think the best use of teachers in a classroom is teaching, not filling out a myriad of reports, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think cabinet voting itself a 35 per cent raise is unconscionable, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think public servants should receive pay and benefits similar to what the private sector can afford, you just might be a Wildroser. If you think \$375 million for MLA offices is a waste of money, you probably already are a Wildroser. If you think golden parachutes and million dollar severance packages should be illegal, you just might be a Wildroser.

If you think governments that award all these things and do all the things I've just mentioned should be voted out of office, then you're definitely a Wildroser.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Government House Leader, you've caught my attention.

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent of this Assembly to continue past 3 p.m., waiving rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

**The Speaker:** Let's move on. Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Calgary-East.

### Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February 3, 1947, was a day that forever changed our province. That day oil was struck at Leduc No. 1, and Alberta went from a have-not agricultural province to an energy giant that became the economic driver of this country.

The story of oil is the story of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre, located on highway 60 in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, showcases this story and the importance of this industry to our daily lives. This world-class museum offers hands-on education in the science of oil and the history of Leduc No. 1 and the role it played in helping shape Alberta's identity. It offers a working oil rig, the world's largest drill bit, public tours, educational programs, interpretive displays, and archival information. It has hosted tourists and students from across Canada and around the world.

In true Alberta spirit it was developed and built through the hard work and dedication of volunteers. The Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre exists today as a not-for-profit museum owned and operated by the Leduc/Devon Oilfield Historical Society. However, Mr. Speaker, after 17 years the discovery centre is struggling. Its volunteers are aging and actually passing on, and its financial resources cannot keep up with rising operational costs. Myself and my colleague the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon have met with members of the society to offer what we can to help keep its doors open.

I would encourage all members to visit this fine testament to our province. I would love to see it become an official provincial

museum. The financial support and increased profile would help keep its doors open for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Calgary-Cross.

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Autism spectrum disorder is a complex condition that impacts brain development, leaving individuals with communication problems, difficulty with typical social interactions, and a tendency to repeat specific patterns of behaviour.

Families with an autistic child spend an immense amount of time and energy learning to understand and communicate with a child who does not respond in typical ways. Mr. Speaker, learning how to adapt as a parent of an autistic child can be incredibly difficult and can cause parents a great deal of hardship and self-doubt. Families can be greatly stressed by uncertainty about the future of their children. Determining what services are available to help can also cause great strain.

However, Mr. Speaker, there can also be great rewards for families with an autistic child when they have the proper support. The agencies that provide support for families dealing with autism in our province need more help and more direction from this government to help them overcome inefficiencies. Work can be done to optimize communication and to help organizations work together and streamline support services to ensure families get the best support on a timely basis.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that this government is committed to providing the best possible care. I'm also confident that we will continue to work diligently to overcome these obstacles and give Alberta families the proper support they deserve to meet the needs of their children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Volunteers

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the strength of our province flows from its people, and leading the way are thousands of dedicated volunteers who've stepped up to make a real difference in their communities. Their efforts create excellent social and cultural programs and provide opportunities for Albertans to participate in recreation and sports activities that help to make every Alberta community a wonderful place to live, work, and visit.

Our volunteers also help to ensure that our citizens continue to enjoy a quality of life which is one of the best in the world, Mr. Speaker, and because an Albertan stepped up to volunteer, other Albertans were able to develop a talent or learn a new skill. Many new Albertans were made to feel at home here while others were able to find the help they needed to get through a crisis.

Mr. Speaker, International Volunteer Day was recognized around the world this past Friday, December 5. On that day we celebrated and recognized the enormous impact that these dedicated individuals have upon their communities, their province, and our nation.

3:00

The hon. Minister of Culture and Tourism presented the Stars of Alberta volunteer award to six incredible Albertans. Akshay Verma from Edmonton and Mitchell Mulhall from Fort McMurray were

in the youth category. Jim Hole and Ingrid Pederson from Edmonton were in the adult category. For the senior category we honoured Donna Du Bois from Three Hills and Gail Wolfe from Cold Lake. There was a very special tribute to Tracy Stewart, who overcame personal challenges to volunteer over 20 years at Edmonton's Norwood extended care facility.

The outstanding contributions of these volunteer stars are an inspiration, Mr. Speaker, to all Albertans and remind each of us that we have the power to make a real difference in our communities.

I now ask that all members of the Assembly join me in thanking our incredible Alberta volunteers.

### Provincial Fiscal Policies

**Mr. Hehr:** It should be no surprise that once again this province is in difficulty as a result of the rise and fall of the price of oil. This has happened time and time again in this province – it's from good times to bad in the blink of an eye – yet this government prefers to play the role of the ostrich and bury its head in the sand instead of fixing our fiscal structure to bring in necessary revenue to fund core programs that families need. Two years ago it was the bitumen bubble, today it's \$65 oil, and tomorrow it could be worse.

Yet it doesn't have to be like this. Alberta is the lowest tax jurisdiction by a country mile. If we adopted Saskatchewan's tax code, the second-lowest tax jurisdiction, we'd bring in roughly \$12 billion more. Accordingly, there are solutions to this roller coaster ride that will provide predictable and sustainable funding. We need to strive not only for a strong economy but a strong society. In my view, we are not doing the best we can.

We need look no further than the Progressive Conservative platform from the last election to highlight where we are failing. Of the 50 schools promised, not one has been completed. We are 2,500 teachers short of where we were in terms of per capita numbers from five years ago. We are the last province without full-day kindergarten. Our 10-year plan to end homelessness has stalled, and 17,000 women fleeing violent situations cannot find room at a shelter. Albertans are languishing in hospitals instead of being in long-term care centres.

So what's the answer? Well, it seems that it's already been provided. In 2008 a blue-ribbon panel stated that we needed to raise revenue. Every Tory Finance minister who has left politics has stated that we have a revenue problem. Although we're under new management, it appears that we are still lacking the intestinal fortitude to raise revenue to ensure Alberta's future is as bright as its past. To be blunt, Mr. Speaker, anyone should be able to figure out what has happened. We have no PST, a flat tax, and the lowest corporate tax rates in the land. Accordingly, this government has options . . .

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

That concludes members' statements.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 2 Alberta Accountability Act

**Mr. Denis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act.

This legislation is part of a package that would help restore public trust, improve accountability, and end entitlements. Bill 2 will strengthen the conflict-of-interest guidelines for political staff, extend the cooling-off period for political staff and designated office holders, and clarify the distinction between the role of registered individual lobbyists and government consultants. Complementing the legislation will be two Treasury Board directives that will eliminate sole-source contracts except in exceptional circumstances and will restrict severance packages for political staff.

Mr. Speaker, with the Alberta Accountability Act we will hold the government to the highest possible standards of public service. The actions and behaviour of those privileged to work for the government must be guided by respect for Albertans and their tax dollars. These people are our bosses. We work for them, not the other way around. These accountability provisions are strong. Albertans deserve no less.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Buffalo.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today. First, is the appropriate number of copies of a postcard from a campaign on the Bill 9 condo act put forward by the Canadian Condominium Institute. The card reads: "I am concerned that Bill 9 has not had the needed public scrutiny that it requires." Undoubtedly the government will be receiving many of these postcards in the coming weeks.

My second tabling is in regard to a letter that was sent by a nurse to the Minister of Health. The letter is clearly illustrating the frustration that many front-line workers have about the serious state of our health care. She writes that the patients are not being looked after properly and that the workers are frustrated as well.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have five tablings in relation to Bill 9, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014, with each one concerned deeply about the fact that government is leaving too much to be written in regulations rather than properly debating and outlining options in the legislation itself. I table the full amendment recommendations of the north Alberta chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute.

Also from the northern Alberta chapter: Band-aid Fix for Condominiums Not Enough and that the "new act lacks input from owners, relies heavily on undebated and yet to be developed regulations."

A third is from Mr. Brian Durkin, a lawyer who attests that to represent Albertans, we need to reconsider Bill 9 and not ram it through without the necessary discussions, consultations, and amendments.

From Dr. June Donaldson, an Alberta condo owner advocate, is the same message about pausing on Bill 9 and ensuring we do the right things in this critical issue for Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Robert Noce, an Edmonton lawyer specializing in condo law, is saying that amendments simply have not gone far

enough and don't specify remedies for the problems. He wants to see this addressed before we pass this bill.

The final two tablings include an article by Annie McEwen, PhD public policy candidate at Carleton University, on child poverty.

Child poverty is not a mysterious unknown threat like terrorism; poverty is hiding in plain view and we all know its awful effects. It's up to all Canadians to listen to our children, to say something, because this is a threat we should all see.

And, obviously, act upon.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a publication in the *Calgary Herald* by James Wood titled Catholic School Leader Discounts Idea of Legal Battle on Gay-Straight Alliances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter from Sherry Miller to Hon. Heather Klimchuk. [interjections] Sherry is a lawyer in Calgary who is writing on behalf of the PDD community. In her view there needs to be more assessment done, and she outlines five very good principles that should be followed and that would add value to our current system, which she finds very onerous and very complex and not serving the interests of the PDD community.

My second tabling stems from my question where I noted that 69 private schools have gone out of business in the last five years. I provide that tabling to back up what I stated in question period.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you. And you heard the response from the House when an hon. member was referred to by personal name, which is frowned upon here.

Let us move on to Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. Hale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required number of copies of a letter that I wish to table. It's from the Bassano parent council, and it's signed by Sandra Mitchell. In this letter they talk about the weighting of the diploma exams. They would like to see that decreased from 50 per cent to 30 per cent, and they have some examples of why they would like to see that done. I would like to table that for future reference for the Education minister if he so wishes to take this under advisement. I know that it's something that has been talked about in the province before, and I'm sure that it will continue to receive some comments.

Thank you.

3:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the news release from the Alberta Forest Products Association applauding Bill 203.

As well, I have five copies of an article published in the *Edmonton Sun* that discusses the benefits of Bill 203 in the urban setting.

I have five copies of a letter of support for Bill 203 from the mayor of Whitecourt.

Also, I have five copies of a news release from the Canadian Home Builders' Association endorsing the plan for six-storey residential structures as proposed in Bill 203.

Thank you, sir.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, the Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2013-14 annual report, the Alberta College of Optometrists 2013 annual report, and the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2013-14, June 1, 2013, to May 31, 2014.

On behalf of the hon. Minister Dirks, the Minister of Education, school jurisdictions audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2013, sections 1, 2, and 3.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there were no points of order today.

### Orders of the Day

#### Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

#### Bill 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014

**The Chair:** I recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

**Mr. Hale:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be brief in my comments in Committee of the Whole.

**Mr. Anglin:** Point of order.

**Mr. Hale:** I see I have a friend in the back making comments again. That's okay. We'll just carry on.

I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 201, and I will wait while the amendment is passed around.

**The Chair:** Sure. Please. We will circulate that. A brief pause.

Hon. member, you may speak to amendment A1.

**Mr. Hale:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. When this bill was first proposed, I took some time and talked to a number of stakeholders in the electricity industry, and this suggestion comes from a few of them. They were in agreement that the name should be changed from "regulated rate option" because there was some confusion.

For the record I would like to read my amendment. It says:

Mr. Hale to move that Bill 201, Electricity Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 2, in the proposed section 149.1(2)(b), by striking out "variable market rate" and substituting "variable default rate".

Now, the reason it was suggested to change it to the "variable default rate" and not have it as the "variable market rate" is that they felt that there could be some confusion with the wholesale market. That is a market that is used by a number of different distributors and suppliers such as Spot Power.

Just to avoid any more confusion, you know, because in the title of this bill it's "Transparency in Billing," I felt that if we could put in the default instead of the market rate, it just makes sense. If you don't sign a contract, the price you pay is the default price. As I mentioned, the regulated rate is based over 120 days, and then there's the wholesale market flow-through rate. That is variable, and that's what they use, what the spot price uses. This just avoids any more confusion.

I would hope that the members would agree and all vote in favour of changing the name to the "variable default rate." Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Although I commend the member for bringing forward this amendment, it's too prescriptive, and it's an issue that I had discussed with the ministry to try to correct. I don't disagree with the attempt, but I'm not going to support the amendment. There will be another amendment that will follow that, hopefully, will correct to what the Department of Energy would like to see.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Other speakers to the amendment?

**Mr. Kang:** I just want to clarify this. Will the consumer be paying the default rate, or will they be paying the variable rate?

**Mr. Hale:** What this amendment does is that the member is changing the name from regulated rate to "variable market rate." That's the rate you get when you don't sign a monthly fixed contract. If this bill passes, then you would get the regulated market rate. I'm saying: don't call it a variable market rate. Call it the variable default rate, because if you don't sign a contract, you get the default price, and that is variable, whether it's the variable market rate or the variable default rate, which I think is better. This doesn't come from me. This comes from industry, from the electricity industry. I've talked to a number of the stakeholders, and they feel that to better clarify, to avoid any type of miscommunication or, you know, any issues, to make it more transparent, they say: call it the variable default rate, and then the consumers know that if you don't have a fixed-price contract, you will default to that variable rate.

**The Chair:** Other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Eggen:** Sorry. I just need some clarification here, then. It's just a different way of saying the similar thing, which is to say that if someone doesn't have a contract, then they are just having their electricity rate reflected on the up-and-down monthly charge, right? It's not like we are pigeonholing people to compel them to have a contract, which I don't often ever advise my constituents to do. I don't want to be tying us down to something like that.

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

**Mr. Hale:** Yeah. Hon. member, it doesn't pigeonhole anybody. It just clarifies that if you do not sign a fixed-price contract, if you don't sign a contract with whatever service provider for whatever rate they will guarantee you, you fall back on the variable default rate, or, as the bill states, the "variable market rate," which is not fixed. I just would like to change it to variable default because it makes a little bit more sense. I want to make sure that there is clarity in the market. There are wholesale market flow throughs. If we talk about the variable market rate and then the wholesale market, this is just a better way to determine, to distinguish that it is the default that you pay without a contract signed.

3:20

**Mr. Kang:** Just, you know, for further clarification, by striking out "variable market rate" and substituting "variable default rate,"

do you think, in your opinion, that consumers will benefit from this change? That's the clarification I want from you.

**Mr. Hale:** Yeah. That's exactly it. Some of the power players in the province have told me that they would like to see a variable default rate so that it's clear for the consumer.

**The Chair:** Are there other speakers to the amendment?  
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Chair:** We're back to the main bill. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have an amendment that I'd like to introduce and move.

**The Chair:** Okay. If you would just pause for a moment, hon. member, we'll have that circulated.

Hon. members, we'll refer to this amendment as A2.

Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you may proceed.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the bill be amended as follows. Section 2 is amended in the proposed section 149.1 (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "6 months" and substituting "8 months" and (b) by striking out subsection (2) and submitting the following:

- (2) The report of the Commission must include
  - (a) a proposed standardized bill for customers that identifies all electric energy and non-energy charges or credits, and
  - (b) proposed amendments to this Act and any related enactment, including the Regulated Rate Option Regulation (AR 262/2005), which must include the replacement of the term "regulated rate" with "variable market rate" or another term that the Commission determines accurately reflects the variable nature of the rate for electricity charged to customers under the regulated rate tariff.

And, finally, by striking out subsection (4) and substituting the following:

- (4) In this section, "customer" means an eligible customer who is not receiving electricity services from a retailer.

Mr. Chair, extending from six months to eight months was negotiated so the commission could take a little bit of extra time to look into this. The matter is actually quite complicated though it might seem simple to many legislators here. In the issue we just debated, industry did have some concerns on the prescriptive nature of what to call the other option, whether it be the variable market rate or the variable default rate. What I've done in this amendment is kept the language but allowed the commission to come up with another term that would satisfy the industry. What I found was that some industry members could not agree on what it should be called. It's going to take a little bit of consultation to come up with something that's acceptable to most and to reflect exactly what it should be called.

Now, I changed also "fixed and variable costs" in the bill to "energy and non-energy charges or credits" to better reflect what happens in the industry and to allow the commission time to figure out how it is going to standardize the bill.

Again, one of the things I did remove was the mandate of tabling the report. Unlike an investigative report, this is something that the ministry actually wants. It is something that the Market

Surveillance Administrator already agrees on. There's a lot of confusion around the billing of utility bills to customers, and they're not able to make choices. What we've done is that we've simplified the bill a little bit, and we've identified exactly how the commission, the Alberta Utilities Commission, should proceed to try to standardize the billing so they can provide a standardized billing process so that customers can be better informed. That's the goal here, to give the commission the flexibility to better inform consumers.

That is the essence of this amendment, and I ask all members to support this. This is something that I have talked with industry and with the ministry and with the commission about on how to proceed, and this is something that the Market Surveillance Administrator would like to see come forward.

Thank you very much.

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

Speaking to the amendment, to amendment A2.

**Mr. Kang:** Mr. Chair, I just want to get a little clarification. Has the industry given any indication to the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre what that term will be called? Have they given you an indication what that will be called, the new term you're looking for? Will it confuse things, or will it be simple? What will that be?

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Yeah. This goes to both amendments just brought forward and why we don't want to be too prescriptive. Right now it's called the regulated rate option, and I proposed "variable market rate." Industry is not necessarily in alignment, so I want to leave that up to the commission. It is their sole responsibility for clarity. I did not want this act to be so prescriptive that we could miss out on the possibility of clarity. The idea is to leave it open for the commission to consult and give it the best possible description so that consumers can make better choices.

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

Are there other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

**The Chair:** Are there other speakers to the bill? The hon. Minister of Human Services.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Chair. I'm just bringing this on behalf of the Minister of Energy on Bill 201. The changes being requested on Bill 201 focus on making consumers' electricity bills easy to understand. Others include showing the details on bills for consumers currently on the regulated rate option and changing the name of the regulated rate option, also known as RRO, or the monthly rate of electricity.

The bill also asks for the Alberta Utilities Commission to be involved in the RRO name change and to submit a report proposing a revised electricity bill for RRO customers that identifies all charges and credits clearly.

Amendments being recommended on the bill: section (1), changing the timelines for the Alberta Utilities Commission to provide a report to eight months instead of the proposed six months. This change will give the commission . . .

**The Chair:** If I may, hon. minister, are you proposing an amendment, or are you just speaking to the amendment that was just dealt with?

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Just speaking in general.

**The Chair:** Please carry on. Thank you.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Chair.

This change will give the commission time to complete their work, including consultations to see what customers need. We need to take into consideration the resources capacity of AUC given other demands. The AUC has various other proceedings under way, and we do not want resources taken away from the AUC's core business. Also, the AUC has a critical role in making timely decisions on the siting of power plants and major electricity and natural gas transmission facilities; regulation of investor-owned electric, natural gas, and water utilities; and adjudication on market and operational rules.

Replacing section (2) of the bill clarifies the standard components of a bill and allows the AUC to recommend a new name for the regulated rate option based on consumer feedback. The changes will allow for a bill that is clear and easy to understand and that will show all energy and nonenergy credits.

The RRO sounds like a rate protected by government. In reality, the RRO is a variable rate that changes every month. If the AUC is to provide a report with recommendations, then it would be consistent to have the AUC also propose a replacement name for the regulated rate option. The amendment clarifies that the AUC may propose a change to the name of the regulated rate option. The AUC will consult with stakeholders and consumers to come up with a name that explains the rate.

The new section (4) clarifies that the commission's report is to only apply to customers on the regulated rate option and not those who have chosen a competitive retailer. In the original wording of the bill it's not clear if standardized bills applied only to regulated-rate consumer bills or also to customers that choose a competitive retailer. The amendment clarified that standardized bills would only apply to regulated rate option customers' bills. Competitive retailers provide competitive prices, and AUC cannot impose the kind of bill private companies or retailers use for their services and customers.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, a safe, reliable, cost-effective, environmentally responsible electricity system is a key priority, and I thank the member for his foresight and his support to improve electricity choices for Albertans across the province.

3:30

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. minister.  
Are there other speakers?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Chair:** The question has been called.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 201 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

**The Chair:** Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? That is carried.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, did you wish to move that the committee rise and report?

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Yes, I'd like to move that the committee rise and report Bill 201.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 201. The committee reports Bill 201 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.  
Does the Assembly concur in the report?

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask for unanimous consent to proceed to third reading of Bill 201.

[Unanimous consent granted]

### **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading**

#### **Bill 201 Electric Utilities (Transparency in Billing) Amendment Act, 2014**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, members of the Assembly. The Market Surveillance Administrator recently reported that information available to Albertans on the cost of electricity is inadequate, insufficient, unclear, and confusing. The report went on to say that lack of accurate information about the cost of residential electricity contracts makes it difficult for householders to choose the lowest cost energy provider. In its State of the Market 2014 report the MSA stated that it has the "view that the tools currently available... are inadequate to facilitate easy, accurate comparisons."

Electricity providers seldom disclose administration fee charges, which vary widely from utility to utility, and don't provide comparisons of the all-in cost of electricity generation, transmission, and distribution. The intent of this bill is to improve disclosure and transparency of the all-in costs included in the ancillary cost of a utility bill. This bill will help consumers to become better informed and better equipped to compare options in a very complicated market.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. member.  
Are there other speakers on third reading of Bill 201?  
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

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

**Bill 203  
Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures)  
Amendment Act, 2014**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations to the mover of Bill 201. Good work.

It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. The purpose of Bill 203 is to enhance and amend the Safety Codes Act, accepting proposals provided in the 2015 edition of the national building code, sir. The proposals we speak to today relate to the height of wood structures. Bill 203 would amend the Safety Codes Act, under which the building code regulation is made, to allow buildings of wood construction to be built to a maximum of six storeys, or 18 metres. Our goal is to adopt in its entirety the code proposals for six-storey wood constructions as proposed in the 2015 edition of the national building code.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes that consumers should have access to a variety of choices when it comes to housing in Alberta, and I agree. Today we are facing many challenges as our population continues to increase. This means that infrastructure is a key priority to ensure that we are meeting the needs of Albertans now and into the future. Bill 203 will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable structure development and will contribute to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I had a support letter from the mayor of Whitecourt. At this time I'd like to read it into the introduction.

Our community's history and heritage is entrenched in the forest industry, and the economic and social impact this industry has in our community is immense. Most notably, our community was recognized nationally for two years in a row as the "Forest Capital of Canada" for the strong commitment both the community and local industry have made to enhancing and sustaining the industry. Bill 203 will provide greater market opportunities for our local industry, further enhancing the economic viability of not only the Town of Whitecourt but also the Province of Alberta.

**The Deputy Speaker:** And you'll table that later, hon. member? Tomorrow?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** I tabled it earlier.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Oh, you did. Wonderful. Thank you.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Bill 203 will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable structure development. Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow contractors and all approved parties of the construction project to utilize wood as building material as long as the building does not exceed six storeys, or 18 metres, in height and the materials used meet national and provincial engineering standards. The changes we are proposing today have been studied, tested, and approved across various professional disciplines, and Alberta can be certain that its safety is and always will be the most important priority in all the proposed code changes in our province.

By increasing the permissible height for the buildings made of wood, we give contractors more affordable options when

undertaking low- to mid-rise building projects, increasing consumer confidence throughout Alberta. By aligning ourselves with the best industry practices, we ensure that the industry professionals are able to provide Albertans with the best options in affordable and safe housing.

Mr. Speaker, as some may already know, the city of Calgary announced in November that they would be accepting building permit applications for six-storey wood-frame buildings for already approved land-use zones. This decision came after two years of participating in engagement with industry and responding to the public review comments regarding the national building code. The goal of accepting six-storey standards is to provide more options to industry and communities to address the housing crunch that Calgary is experiencing while also considering the overall safety of its residents. This is an example of industry working together to push new initiatives in building standards, and I applaud them for their efforts. Calgary has also been adamant in taking advantage of the association of cost savings with wood construction. Up to 20 per cent is what's proposed.

**3:40**

I believe it's important that we move on this initiative and align Alberta building codes with current standards being used across Canada. Mr. Speaker, B.C. has adopted six-storey wood buildings since 2009, and Ontario will be accepting the same standards in 2015. Since 2009 B.C. has built over 50 six-storey wood buildings.

Mr. Speaker, earlier I tabled some documents of support. The Alberta Forest Products Association:

"This is great news for the [Alberta] forest industry and for Alberta's economy," said AFPA President and CEO Paul Whittaker. "Wooden midrise buildings are faster and more economical to construct, far less carbon intensive, and use a renewable, locally-sourced material. Using wood also supports a major part of Alberta's economy and provides jobs in communities throughout the province."

As well, the Canadian Home Builders' Association endorses building plans for six-storey residential structures.

Building with wood can reduce costs by 15 to 20 per cent, a significant savings at a time when the cost of buying a home is rising out of reach of young people and families [across Alberta]. This innovation can also help municipalities reach their targets for higher density by allowing more units to be constructed on sites that were previously limited to four storeys, said Jim Rivait, CEO of Canadian Home Builders' Association – Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I look forward to hearing from the rest of the hon. members from all sides of the House on the debate of Bill 203.

Thank you.

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to offer my congratulations to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. As Winston Churchill famously said at one time, "He is the only . . . bull I know who carries his [own] china closet with him." But I appreciate the fact that he has been able to get this done and done swiftly. Congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy today to rise and support Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. This bill seeks to increase the maximum height for wood structures to six storeys from the current limit of four. There are a

number of good reasons to support this bill. Wood construction is a cheaper alternative to other types of construction. Not only are the buildings less expensive to construct, but this would mean that more units can be constructed on the same site, further reducing costs. Estimates are that the cost of the building can be reduced by 15 to 20 per cent when wood construction is used. This can help builders to provide more affordable housing at a time when our province is struggling to meet the demands of our fast-growing populations, and this is great for both new neighbourhoods and for infill projects.

In Calgary we typically have a vacancy rate of around 1 per cent. This has put some extraordinary pressures on the city for a long time. Finding affordable, available housing is sometimes next to impossible. Earlier this year Calgary and Edmonton saw fixed-sample rental rates rise by up to 6 per cent, a reality that is hardest on our low-income residents and also keeps people from moving to Alberta. We simply need more space. On top of the benefit of increased housing this bill will also support Alberta's forestry industry, which provides renewable building materials.

This change to the Safety Codes Act follows similar changes by British Columbia and Ontario and is in line with the recommendations of the national building code of Canada for 2015.

I would like to recognize that there are some legitimate concerns about safety. I understand that there is a need for the installation of more automatic sprinklers in these structures and that water pressure to feed those systems must be adequate. This means that these buildings aren't appropriate for every community in the province, but given the presence of and use of appropriate safety standards, this is a good solution to a big problem that Alberta is facing.

I would like to thank the member for bringing this bill forward, and we will be supporting it. Thank you.

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

I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Anglin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't cite the same facts that have already been cited. I rise to support this bill for all the logical reasons that have already been given but mostly because I don't own just one chainsaw; I own three chainsaws. I support the forestry industry. I always have supported the forestry industry. It is a renewable resource, and it's one of our greatest economic drivers in this province right now. This legislation helps our own local industries. Not only that, it does address certain other needs with low-cost alternatives. There's a whole lot of things that are good about this bill. I will tell you that the industry and Alberta Forest Products Association support this bill because it supports them.

To the hon. member: thank you very much for introducing this. I will be supporting the bill.

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

Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-McCall.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak about this bill. I must say that my first impression, before we did some research, was that there must have been a rule or a law that had prohibited this for a reason in the past, you know, and: what can we learn from that, and how have things changed so that a structure of six storeys made of wood is actually safe? My understanding is that there are six-storey structures made of wood already, but we have to go to a federal level to approve that height.

This bill seems to be changing that somehow. I won't repeat what many of the other speakers have said already, that there are some advantages to building with wood. Its durability is clear, its insulation capacity is clear, and it is more economical as well. There's a level of sort of a renewable aspect to wood, which is good as well. But, of course, my first instinct on this is probably, really, the reason why they in fact have not approved six-storey wood structures in the past, and that's the issue around fires.

I mean, anecdotally, I have seen a number of terrible condo fires and row housing fires that we've had here in the city of Edmonton over the last number of years, either with often large condo structures at sort of the last stages of their construction or even fires getting out of control in established buildings that have been inhabited. So I just have a real reservation about these sorts of structures unless we do something to change the way in which we provide sprinklers and safety equipment as well.

I know from the fire chief here in Edmonton, that I speak to on a fairly regular basis, that they have real concerns about modern construction and the capacity for a building to go up in flames, to be engulfed in flames. There's a standing sort of rule that you want a building to sustain, even when it is on fire, the capacity for people to get out for a number of minutes, maybe up to 20 minutes, so that lives can be saved. That's my main concern, but it seems as though my concern has been mitigated by a number of people that have said that they can sustain a safe structure at this height as long as adequate sprinkler systems and escape mechanisms and other rules are put into place about limitations on barbecues on decks and so forth.

I know that we had a terrible fire here in Edmonton not even two years ago where the fire started from flowerpot containers smouldering from cigarette butts and then burning down multistorey structures made of wood. So that's just my main concern.

I think it's not unfair to be obsessive about fire, and I think that is the main question that I put forward to the mover of this bill, to ensure that all of those precautions are met. Otherwise, I think it's actually an interesting bill, and it certainly would be something I could support if I knew that the level of safety was comparable or exceeded existing structures that we already approve here in the province of Alberta.

Thanks a lot.

3:50

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. There are two parts to the bill. The bill proposes increasing the demand for lumber to increase housing affordability. Since the member hails from the Whitecourt area, which has been named the forest capital of Canada for the last two years, it's likely that his motivations stem mostly from the former, but this is going to make housing affordable for young families, for new immigrants, and for newcomers to Alberta.

In Surrey the condos are built from wood. They are selling from \$300 to \$370 per square foot compared to concrete buildings which are selling from \$425 to \$450 per square foot. This is an innovative way to make housing more affordable for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, because wood is easier and cheaper to build with than concrete or steel. Homebuyers will have access to more housing options at a larger range of price points.



As the housing market is getting really, really tight and rent is getting very expensive, it's just getting to be way out of reach for most new families or one-income earners for the building that I live in. The regulations say that, you know, we should only be spending 30 per cent of our gross income on housing, but the rent has gone up so much, and some families are spending almost 40 to 50 per cent of their income on rent, Mr. Speaker.

Allowing six-storey wood construction will increase the demand for lumber and should help stimulate the province's economy and the province's forestry and construction industries, Mr. Speaker, which I think is badly needed in light of what is happening with oil prices. Other provinces are already doing this, and Canada's national building and fire codes will soon permit this as well starting in January 2015. In Alberta the city of Calgary already accepts building permit applications for six-storey, wood-frame buildings, and the province needs to catch up. With this bill, I think we will be catching up with other jurisdictions.

As a renewable and recyclable and environmentally sustainable building material, we should be encouraging the use of wood in more applications. This is going to make housing more affordable for young and new families, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker.

My concern is about the fires and the safety of firefighters, you know, in case the building is on fire. Those are the concerns that I have with wood-frame buildings, Mr. Speaker. If those concerns are somehow mitigated or addressed, that would be great. I hope there will be stricter fire regulations that those buildings will have to meet. I am concerned about the hallways, elevators, and staircases. How safe and fireproof will they be? As long as the firefighters are safe fighting those fires – you know, safety is paramount. As long as safety is met, I think that would be great. Overall, this is a good bill, and the Alberta Liberal caucus and I will be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real honour to rise and speak to this bill today. To express to you how I feel about the bill, I need to tell you a little bit about my relationship with wood and with forestry. I graduated school in 1975, and after a brief stint at the University of British Columbia, where I majored in significant rock concerts of the Pacific Northwest – my parents were proud – I left university, and I went to college to study forest technology. I did so for two reasons. One, my father was in the sawmill business, and I knew a little bit about the sawmill business at the time, but, secondly, I just simply loved wood. My father was always into woodworking, and I did it myself. I absolutely loved wood, and that was the start of a career.

So I went to college, the College of New Caledonia. I did a forest technologist program and did a speciality in forest resource harvesting technology, so harvesting systems, road and bridge construction, that kind of thing. It started a lifelong love of forestry, and I did a number of years with the B.C. Forest Service, mostly in the protection divisions, so I was a firefighter. That's where I met my wife. She was the first female forest fire helitack firefighter in B.C., and we worked together. I worked a number of years. In addition to fire, I worked on the mountain pine beetle program in British Columbia.

I came to a point in my career with the B.C. Forest Service where I didn't feel I was going to achieve what I wanted, so I left, and I went to university. I went to the University of New Brunswick for five years and completed a degree in forestry. I worked in forestry in New Brunswick and northern Quebec, did

undergrad research work – I had an NSERC research scholarship as an undergrad – and I absolutely loved it. I met some just incredible people in the industry, in academia, just amazing. I've always loved it.

So I got my degree, and I left, and I was on my way back home and never made it. I actually stopped on the way home to B.C. to visit a project in Peace River, and I never made it past that, Mr. Speaker. I became a professional forester in Alberta, registered with the college, and I became a planner, forest management plans for Diashowa-Marubeni, the pulp mill in Peace River. Moving through other positions there, I wound up as their senior forestry adviser. Through all of that, I enforced the fact in my own mind – and I hope in a lot of other people's minds – that wood is an absolutely incredible material. It is a sustainable, renewable material, and it is absolutely beautiful. To this day I still love it.

If anybody in this Chamber has never had the opportunity to go to Calgary's Canada Olympic Park and have a look at Hockey Canada's facility there, do so. In there you'll find the world's longest curved glulam beams. They're just an absolute work of art, and they're made of wood. I should probably point out that glulam beams in that application perform better than steel does in roof girders. In a fire a steel beam, as soon as it gets hot, will fail. A wood beam will snap and crack, and it'll stay there for hours and hours. It performs better than steel, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolutely amazing material.

I am so proud to have spent my life in forestry, in a career that I was proud of and never regretted for a minute. I was proud to embark as well on a second career, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA. I'm very proud that I was elected to represent my constituents. But I've never forgotten my first profession, one that meant so much to me.

In my first profession as a forester I still have some requirements. As a registered forester you have to do certain things, and one is educate and inform the public because forestry in Canada is a public resource. In this second career that I love I've never forgotten that first obligation. I've obviously had the opportunity in my career here, serving briefly as the minister of SRD but always being involved in some natural resource policy position here, to be involved in forestry. Every once in a while, actually quite frequently, those two careers collide, and I get to talk about representing my constituents and talk about forestry, and those are great days, indeed. I've had significant opportunity to have input in natural resource policy.

Today is one of those days, Mr. Speaker, and I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne and the forest industry as well for this bill that's before us today.

**4:00**

This is, unfortunately, new to us, Mr. Speaker. These buildings have been going up around the world, actually higher than six storeys. Unquestioned safety record.

I'm very, very proud to support this bill and, in fact, urge all my colleagues in this House to do the same. I would say: do it because it's safe, or do it because wood is an absolutely excellent insulator. It's one of the best natural insulators there is. Do it because wood is a truly sustainable, renewable product. Do it because the production of wood has a very low carbon footprint. It's a very environmentally responsible business. Do it because when you harvest wood and manufacture wood products, all of the residual material is used; nothing is wasted. Do it because the harvesting of wood leads to regeneration and the production of future habitat out there. That's our opportunity to ecologically manage our landscape going forward, the use of the forest industry on this

landscape. It's very important. Mostly, do it because wood is beautiful. It's an incredible material. We should use more of it.

I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for the bill and for the opportunity to speak to it today.

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

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

**Mr. McDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. Alberta is a province that is bountiful in its natural resources, and one of these resources, obviously, is our forests. Lumber is one of our most abundant renewable resources and has been a vital component for construction in this province.

As our urban areas expand, we look to build higher so that we can deal with the higher population densities, making cities and towns more sustainable. Wood is an abundant, renewable, local product that can reduce the cost of a building, conserving our more expensive materials like concrete. Unfortunately, current legislation restricts the construction of wood buildings to nine metres or three to four storeys. Bill 203 would amend building code regulation 117/2007, allowing wooden buildings to be built to a height of 18 metres or six storeys. This comes on the heels of recommendations by the national building code of Canada to raise the maximum building code to 18 metres. There's been a movement across the country to use wood in construction of mid-rise buildings. Initial skepticism has led to increased safety provisions included in Bill 203. The code proposes including mandatory provisions for standard life safety features, sprinkler systems and fire protection materials.

This legislation is not just about cheaper housing. It is about allowing the use of materials other than plastic, steel, glass, or concrete. If passed, Bill 203 will allow builders to use less of these materials on six-storey buildings in favour of wood. In doing so, we can conserve costly and limited-time materials like concrete and plastic for building large infrastructure. According to recent Alberta Treasury Board and Finance population projection figures Alberta's total population is projected to reach 6.2 million by 2041. This will put a significant burden on already tight housing markets in our province. Furthermore, it will make the cost of buying a house drastically increase. However, Bill 203 has the potential to alleviate some of these problem by making high-density housing cheaper and easier to build. This shift is expected to reduce the cost for people entering the housing market. Specifically, it is expected to lower the cost of construction by 15 to 20 per cent. This has a great potential value for building affordable housing across the province of Alberta.

It's also very beneficial for the forestry industry, whose work will likely make a huge difference in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that Bill 203 has the potential to positively affect our economy. As you may know, my constituency is heavily involved in the forestry sector. Grande Prairie-Smoky contains several lumber mills, including Canfor, Weyerhaeuser, Ainsworth, and Millar Western. For the people of my constituency the use of wood as a building material means one fundamental, and that's jobs. Having a chance to use more domestic products locally will benefit our forestry sector and create wonderful opportunities for the constituency and all of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Allowing our forestry industry to grow will also help spur innovation in our province. The development of new technologies will make our province stronger internationally. This innovation can come from both the forestry and the construction industries. For example, in Grande Prairie there has been a recent advancement regarding a new saw head. In order to adhere to new safety standards, industry will need to create a different approach for the use of wood. Being able to develop solutions at home that also work abroad adds value to the entire lumber industry and will help to further highlight our industry.

Finally, I'd like to point out that Bill 203 would help make building materials in our province more sustainable. It will do so by using wood for construction. I'm sure it is quite an obvious point but nonetheless an important one that the renewable resource of wood has an abundant supply. Alberta is covered by about 38 million hectares of forest. As a result, we have access to a large supply of domestic lumber. This will allow the use of expensive materials for large construction projects that need them while using wood under six storeys. This will also conserve resources for smaller buildings.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will help us utilize our resources more effectively and also make the work of ESRD much easier and even more valuable. Bill 203 offers Alberta a creative way to conserve nonrenewable building materials and access available local resources while creating jobs and keeping Alberta safe. For the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky this represents the potential for a significant boost in the use of local labour and resources.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank everyone for allowing me the time to speak today and supporting this bill. I commend the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for his bill.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, please.

**Mr. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion on Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I want to thank the hon. member for bringing this bill forward and for being a promoter of sustainable construction and building safety.

If passed, Bill 203 will amend the Safety Codes Act, which falls under the building code regulation. This amendment would increase Alberta's access to a comprehensive range of selection in building construction. The amendment would allow the use of wood in construction of buildings to a maximum height of six storeys or 18 metres. This bill would put into motion certain policies that were brought about in the 2015 edition of the national building code.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see the hon. member advocating for Alberta to remain modern and current in terms of infrastructure for the province. Presently the Alberta building code states that all wood buildings have a height restriction of nine metres, which is approximately three to four storeys. That restriction dates back to 2006 when it appeared in the national building code, but the national building code has been modernized. As I stated previously, the newly released standards for 2015 propose a height of 18 metres, which doubles the previous standard. Other provinces have already followed in the federal government's footsteps. Provinces like British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario have already made changes to their standards. Alberta, however, currently trails behind. It's time for Alberta to catch up with the other provinces. I support the hon. member for bringing this issue to the forefront.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue for my constituents of Banff-Cochrane. We live, especially in the Bow Valley, in an incredibly fragile and environmentally sensitive area. Allowing a reduced footprint, therefore higher density, will accommodate the growing housing needs in our community but, at the same time, reduce the footprint in an already fragile and stressed environment.

**4:10**

From a municipal perspective, Mr. Speaker, if public transit is ever to succeed in our major urban centres and our smaller urban centres, for that matter, we need to have the densities to allow that to happen. Six-storey structures that are affordable because of their wood construction are an absolute necessity if we're going to see public transit succeed and remove many of the vehicles from our roads.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government has demonstrated its commitment to principles of sustainable forest management and responsible stewardship. This has been done through development of rigorous legislation and policies: policies for protection, for conservation, and for the sustainable management of forests. Government foresters and biologists work alongside forest industry representatives to develop long-term plans that ensure that forest capital is maintained for future generations. I'm proud to say that Spray Lake Sawmills operates in our constituency of Banff-Cochrane, and they are a great example of forest stewardship and forward thinking. They are constantly moving ahead, exploring new methods to reduce the impact that forestry has on our landscape.

The forestry sector is an integral part of our provincial economy. It will continue to play an important role in the diversification of Alberta's economy and Alberta's prosperity. Bill 203 would build on this success. The Alberta forestry sector is a vital part of dozens of communities around the province, providing employment for some 13,000 people, about 400 of those in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. The forestry industry in Alberta creates billions of dollars each year for the provincial economy. Forest products produced in Alberta range from commodity lumber to market pulp, from animal bedding materials to a variety of engineered wood products. Companies in this sector also provide ecosystem services like land-use planning, reclamation, and carbon sequestration.

I'm very pleased to stand here today, Mr. Speaker, in support of Bill 203. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Rowe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did have an opportunity to talk with the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne when this bill first came out, and I took a look at it. One of the things that concerned me about the bill was that it did not address the requirement for sprinkler systems in the building. I got a suitable answer back, I felt, that that would have to be another change in the Safety Codes Act and dealt with through Municipal Affairs, probably. So I'm happy with that response, and I'm pleased to support the bill.

Alberta should not be lagging behind others in increasing choices for builders, owners, and developers. Wood is a low-cost, green, renewable construction material which would support Alberta's forestry industry, and we all want to see that happen. The fact is that it's renewable like a crop you plant and harvest. It lowers construction costs probably 12 to 20 per cent, somewhere in there, over other materials, and can be erected more quickly than concrete or steel, saving time and money for developers. The

initiative furthers the whole scope of providing affordable housing by increasing the density.

I had some concern regarding smaller communities and how they would respond to this. I think the smaller communities kind of fixed the problem themselves. Fire departments would have to have ladder trucks and so on. They'd have to have a sufficient water supply to supply a full sprinkler system. I think that kind of cures itself, so I'm not so concerned about that anymore.

It harmonizes the laws of Alberta with the laws of British Columbia as a member of the New West Partnership. As I've said before, it supports Alberta's forest products sector and provides construction material close to the source.

With that, I think all the other comments have been made, but I do support the bill and will be voting in favour of it. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

**Mrs. Towle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. I commend the hon. member for his continued service and dedication to the bill that we speak of today. Bill 203 proposes to amend the building code regulations to allow wood constructions to a maximum of six storeys or 18 metres. The intent of the bill is to adopt code proposals for the allowable height of wood construction to six storeys as proposed in the 2015 edition of the national building code. This bill brought forward will ensure a commitment to safe, sound, and affordable infrastructure development in this province, much of which we've heard support for from many members in this House. These factors are important to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta, and I'm proud to rise and support it today.

Many jurisdictions have already begun to implement the standards allowing for six-storey wood construction. The city of Calgary will be the first jurisdiction in Canada to accept the proposed changes to the 2015 building code standards, that suggest that six-storey wood construction is safe, sound, and an affordable building material. Sustainability is also an important aspect to using wood as a construction material, and I believe that by raising the allowable height for buildings constructed of wood, we are paving the way for affordable and sustainable infrastructure projects, which benefit all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario recently approved changes to the Ontario building code to allow for what they have called wood-frame construction for buildings up to six storeys. There have been two bills introduced in their Legislature supporting this initiative, with no luck in passing due to a prorogued government, but the Ontario government understands the benefits of raising the allowable height for wood-constructed infrastructure in their province. Height increases in Ontario have finally been approved and will be effective on January 1, 2015. These changes will bring the province to similar standards set in British Columbia as well as several jurisdictions in the United States and in the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is simple. This is a housekeeping bill that will allow stakeholders to follow an updated Alberta building code that is technically in line with national standards. I believe that it is important to all of our industries that will be affected by these changes. The changes being proposed here today will offer designers new opportunities for innovation that will help municipalities meet urban densification plans and create more affordable housing options.

Mr. Speaker, that is the part of the bill that is most important to me. The cost and the time allocations that are currently in place do not allow for enough affordable housing, and there's clearly a crisis of affordable housing in this province. Just as we have, Ontario, B.C., and now Calgary have realized the benefits experienced by adopting the national proposed changes to the building code regulations. Executive director for Ontario Wood Works!, Marianne Berube, said that they are looking forward to the new mid-rise buildings that will be created as a result of the recent amendments. Natural Resources and Forestry minister Bill Mauro mentioned that one of his main goals in the January 2015 legislation is the jobs that will be created through the expanded use of a sustainable resource.

This simply shows that the benefits of adopting the proposal to increase the height for buildings made of wood construction can have benefits that spread across a range of different industries. Over the years experts in Ontario have been following the controversial height changes to wood-constructed buildings. Early last year a group of Ontario engineers and architects toured half a dozen new British Columbia condo developments where they have been pushing the limits of wood construction since the Wood First Act of '09. Steven Street of Wood Works! Ontario was among the group that travelled to B.C. By the end of that trip Mr. Street claimed that what B.C. had done was fantastic. They had been successful in building nice and affordable places to live.

Mr. Speaker, today we speak to the same initiative in Bill 203. By increasing the permissible height for buildings constructed of wood, we are impacting the industry in a positive way, allowing more affordable projects to be completed in a considerably shorter period of time. Further to Ontario experts travelling to B.C., it was realized that upwards of 170 wood building projects were being constructed at the time. Ontario was able to see first-hand that by removing the barriers to using materials other than plastic, steel, glass, and concrete, the industry was able to flourish in a way that benefited consumers, retailers, and users.

4:20

Tad Putyra, chief executive developer of Great Gulf homes' low-rise division in Ontario, stated that most importantly, six-storey wood construction can be as much as 20 per cent cheaper than traditional concrete and steel and far faster to build. This is going to make huge improvements in affordable housing initiatives. Mr. Putyra outlined that much of the materials can even be prefabricated and constructed on-site, which is a huge efficiency that affects the overall costs.

Mr. Speaker, wood construction has been very popular, very respected, and very successful for many years in other jurisdictions, not only in Canada but also across the globe. I believe that there is an increasing demand for affordable low-rise infrastructure in this province as our population continues to rise. Alberta's population growth is rising at a steady rate, and it is our responsibility to address the needs that result from this growth, including increased demands for jobs and affordable housing. Bill 203 will ensure that we are able to meet these demands while showing our continued support of industry professionals and experts that have been waiting for these changes for years. As we look at the proposed changes to the Safety Codes Act in this bill and consider the potential advantages that would be experienced in this province, as they have been in others, I see no reason that we do not move forward with this initiative.

As I have already mentioned, Alberta's population is increasing at a very rapid and consistent pace. It is, again, our responsibility to make sure that we have the appropriate infrastructure in place to meet the population demands that our province will soon be

facing. I believe that Bill 203, brought forward by the hon. member, is steering us in the right direction. I will support this bill, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for proposing the bill that will see benefits in industries and for everyday Albertans across this province for years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and actually support Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. I just want to start off by saying that it's been a while in this House since I've seen legislation, private members' bills pass so quickly through the Legislature. We've seen Bill 202 pass very, very quickly, and now we're on to Bill 203. What's even more interesting to me is that we're finally starting to get some debate from the government members, which I think is nice to see, actually. I would like to see more of that if we could when we're talking about government bills. I think that's more important than anything when we're debating some of the government bills that are crossing this floor back and forth.

If we could take what we're seeing today and what we've seen in the past, other than Bill 201, what we saw in Bill 202 and Bill 203, government members standing up and speaking – maybe we'll hopefully see that tonight when we're dealing with Bill 9, the condominium act, and some of those. I know that there is some real concern outside of this Legislature from stakeholders on Bill 9. I know that our Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is going to be providing several amendments on that particular bill. So I'm looking forward to seeing some good discussion tonight.

I have to say that the conversation I've heard so far on Bill 203 has been interesting. I loved the comments from the minister when he talked about his experience as a forest technologist I think was his word and his love for wood. I actually am reading a book right now called *The Boys in the Boat*, which talks about construction with wood and building a boat and their win in regard to the 1934 Olympics and the love for wood that the particular trainer had when these young fellows were paddling – I guess that's what it's called – and what wood can do and the type of wood.

Our Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne I've known for a long time and actually have a great deal of respect for him. When I was sitting as a member of the government, he was talking to me about the importance of forest technology and some of the forest companies that are in his area and the importance of the forest technology to this province. Obviously, the wood is what we're centred on in this bill about affordable infrastructure development and its conduciveness to the growth and prosperity of municipalities and communities across Alberta. Anyone who is involved in this Legislature knows the importance of bringing affordable housing into this province.

I am, honestly, the last person that should be standing up and talking about building anything because anything that has anything to do with building or technology I end up breaking. So I'm not the best person in the world to talk about making anything with wood, making anything with anything, quite frankly. My husband always says: whatever you do, don't let my wife touch anything to do with technology. I needed to get a photocopy of something, and I said to the young page, "You do not want me touching that because I will break it, honestly. So if you could just sort of show me through the process." Anybody who knows me as an MLA knows that everything I touch breaks.

I like the idea of what he's doing. One of the things that I hope the member will stand up and speak to, which I'm a little concerned about – and I'm sure he has the right answers – is fires. Wood burns very, very rapidly. I hope the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is paying attention, that he will talk, stand up, and tell me about the safety of wood, because I'm concerned about fire. Anyone who has seen forest fires knows how quickly wood can burn. I'm sure he has the right answer, honestly. I can't imagine this particular individual would talk about wood construction and wood homes and what we're talking about – it's an increasing choice for builders, owners, developers. It's low cost; it's green; it's renewable construction. I haven't heard anybody talk to me about the safety factors yet. I may have missed that. I can imagine that some of the fire and safety industry people are not fully supportive of taller wood buildings, and I need to understand why they are not supportive of that. Is it because of fire? The six-storey wood construction requires more sprinklers, obviously, because it burns quicker. Concealed areas could be a problem.

I guess for me the process of allowing this bill to go forward is key. It makes a lot of sense to me. I understand that B.C. has had six-storey wood construction since 2009, so obviously the member can talk to us about how that's developed in B.C. Has there been any fire hazard? Are there some problems that B.C. has seen since they implemented this in 2009? I know – and it's been brought forward in the past – that Mr. Stanley, who's the general manager of planning development and assessment for Calgary, likes the idea.

I'm worried about the zero lot lines that we see going up, especially in Calgary, and how close a proximity we're seeing homes together. One sees the fires that we see going on now just with the construction that homes are currently built under. I guess for me that's my biggest concern. I'm sure that the member has the answers for me. I just haven't heard what those answers are, how you're going to prepare for that. We talk about – and I brought this up just earlier – the need for more automatic sprinklers. I guess that with forest products and wood products I really would like to hear what the member has to say when we're in second reading. Is he going to address the concerns of the fire and safety people? If I may, that's what I'd like to say. I like where he's going with this. I don't think anybody can say that we don't need affordable housing. If he would address the issues of fire, I'd be more than pleased to continue speaking in support of this.

4:30

**Mr. Jeneroux:** I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, and I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for bringing forward this bill. Bill 203 amends the Safety Codes Act, under which the building code regulation allows wood buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys, 18 metres.

You can never talk enough about wood, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the hon. member pined over the intent to adopt the code proposals for six-storey wood buildings as proposed by the national building code 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I believe strongly that Albertans should have choices when it comes to construction materials as long as the construction is safe. Wood was once tossed aside in favour of steel and concrete for mid- and high-rise buildings, but now new information is waking us up to the potential of wood construction once again.

Understanding the potential of wood products is simply about knowing the bare facts. There have been “tree-mendous” numbers of studies and reports, Mr. Speaker, showing that six-storey wood construction can be safe. Many of those reports have been issued in Canada. The Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, CCBFC, has looked closely at the 2010 national building and fire codes of Canada; specifically, the restriction of wood buildings to four storeys in height.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, a joint task force was established in 2011 which would lead to the review of current requirements and make recommendations. The task group ensured that the matter was studied extensively. Four specific areas were examined: fire protection, emergency response, building and plumbing services, and structural and earthquake design. The task group concluded that the height and aerial limits for buildings constructed of combustible materials could safely be increased to six storeys.

Ontario and B.C. have chosen to allow six-storey framed construction, and I understand, Mr. Speaker, they have been very “poplar.”

Bill 203 would allow Alberta to take advantage of this trend to the benefit of those who live, work, and build in this province. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today and would encourage all members to support this bill.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Strankman:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the dissertation from the member previous, it's going to be a knotty situation to come forward with my presentation. As a long-time agricultural producer I, too, recognize and appreciate the value of wood although where I live, in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, poplar is not necessarily popular. It's not very tall, but willow and sagebrush, the lower growing vegetation, are.

I want to make mention of another previous member's comments regarding zero boundaries for some of this wood construction with certain height characteristics. I think that's important because in some generational societies we've seen where improperly protected wood structures can create a fire hazard. With our modern abilities for sprinkler systems and that sort of development and other modern features, there may be able to be safety presentations brought forward there. In something as significant as a six-storey wood structure that would certainly be significant.

Again, the facility of using wood is significant in that it is a renewable resource and is popular in this country and in this province. It also provides a substantive industry for the harvesting, regeneration, manufacture, and presentation of that product. I think it's an interactive source of sustenance for our society. I, too, am supportive of any innovative way that we can use regenerative products. I know that may not be a “poplar” word, but I'm trying to get it out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for a chance to speak to this. It's an important subject for my constituents, for my constituency, and I'm pleased to have the chance to speak to that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed probably by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

**Mr. Quest:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to add a few comments. It is a privilege to rise here today to join in the discussion on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I think it's important that we all spruce up

our knowledge of the latest technologies with respect to the treatment of forest products and now the obvious safety of using those materials in wooden structures up to six storeys. Most of it has been said already. I think the arguments have been made.

I very much support this bill, and with that, I conclude my comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour. I'm not going to . . .

**Mr. Eggen:** Make a wood joke.

**Mr. Anderson:** I can't best – you know, I have no wood jokes. [interjections] No. There are too many ways that that could go wrong at this point, so I'm going to refrain from that.

I am going to stand and speak in favour of this bill. I do want to congratulate the hon. member, the hon. government whip, and say that he's done a fantastic job on this bill.

**An Hon. Member:** Agreed.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yeah. It's good that we've got agreement there.

This hon. member has, actually, a history with private members' bills. He seems to find those little gems that are just kind of things that were left out for a while that should have been done, kind of the holdouts. He finds them and gets them in through private members' bills or government legislation. This is another one.

This is a very good bill, and the reason is, in my view, that obviously we have an issue in this province. Although the economy probably will slow down a bit over the next couple of years, we will always be facing a challenge of affordable housing. That's always going to be an issue, and I think that some of the knee-jerk reaction to that sometimes when we face these issues is that, well, we have to bring in new subsidies or that we have to bring in rent controls or that we have to somehow interfere in the market in some way to look like we're doing something when, really, there are some very practical solutions that could be introduced that will lower costs for housing and let market forces allow for a lowering of costs with regard to affordable housing.

It's not just an example such as the one here. You know, I look at this issue in and around secondary suites and so forth, obviously a bit of a minefield. I know the former mayor of Edmonton would probably agree that it's a bit of a minefield with regard to secondary suites. At the end of the day, these are very simple solutions, with no cost to government to implement some of these common-sense solutions that will use market forces to lower the price of housing in a sustainable way and won't interfere in the market unduly, and I think that that's important.

**4:40**

As has been said here, I will say as well that one of the reasons why this is a good solution, why it will decrease the cost of construction, is, of course, that using wood lowers construction costs – the estimates vary – 12 to 20 per cent over other materials and can be put up more quickly than concrete or steel, which, of course, saves time for developers as well and, again, lowers the price of the housing. That is definitely something that I think we'll see immediate impact from going forward as, obviously, if it costs less to build something, it generally will cost less to purchase. So that is definitely a very good reason for passing this bill.

Obviously, there are some issues we're going to need to deal with. I'm assuming that this will be taken care of by other safety

code regulations, but if not, they certainly should be updated. Wood is more flammable than other materials like, obviously, steel and so forth. There are different treatments that you can give wood that will minimize that risk: pressure treating and so forth, new technologies, chemicals – and there are others – things like that that make it less likely to burn. Also, of course, we already have many regulations that include sprinkler systems and so forth that should mitigate these risks.

So, yeah, I support this, hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. This is a good job. This is good work. This is quality work. Let's all give him a round of applause.

I will take my seat for the next 10 or 15 minutes, and hopefully I'd love to hear what other hon. members across the way feel about this bill. If you would, please stand. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and then Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

**Mr. Mandel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will and I would. I'm not sure that that goes together.

It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I commend the hon. member for his continued dedication to the bill that I rise to speak to today.

Bill 203 proposes to amend the Safety Codes Act and the building code regulations to allow wood-constructed buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys, or 18 metres. I would digress for a moment in that the city of Edmonton really believes this is a vitally important project. We need to find new and innovative ways to build housing in our city and across the province, so I really commend the member.

Mr. Speaker, the very intent of this bill is to adopt code proposals for increasing the allowable height of wood buildings to six storeys as outlined in the 2015 edition of the national building code. The bill being brought forward today will positively impact consumer confidence and satisfaction across the construction and housing industry here in our province and open up doors for all kinds of new housing ideas. Among the factors that will contribute to the increase in consumer satisfaction are the lower construction costs, which are vitally important, associated with wood buildings, not lesser quality but lower construction costs.

Wood Works! Alberta along with various other stakeholders operating in the industry has highlighted this as an important aspect of increasing the permissible height for wood-frame buildings. Mr. Speaker, Wood Works! Alberta is a joint program of the Alberta Forest Products Association and the Canadian Wood Council. Depending on the building design, industry experts continue to state that a 12 to 20 per cent saving is experienced when wood is utilized as a construction material. But even more than that, the time in which you can put a wood building up is substantially quicker, which saves even more.

Marco Civitarese, manager and chief building official with inspections and permit services in Calgary, continues to state the importance of updating Alberta's building code regulation for wood construction. Marco highlights that Bill 203 would save time and money, adding to consumer confidence and overall satisfaction. Mr. Speaker, by saving money on such projects, consumers and professionals are able to utilize high levels of cost savings, contributing to overall industry confidence and consumer satisfaction in Alberta. Experts confirm that when using wood as a construction material, much of it can be constructed directly on site, creating countless scenarios for high cost savings, and there are many places in Alberta right now where they're doing modular

construction, that can even speed up this kind of construction by building things in a plant for six-storey buildings. The amendment we speak of today will ensure that more housing projects are completed on budget and on time.

This speaks to another positive aspect of wood as a construction material, that is outlined by experts, the facilitation of increasing urban populations. Our population totals are on the rise, with no signs of slowing. Good news. By enabling the construction of six-storey wood buildings, we are actively meeting the growing need for urban housing in this province. Mr. Speaker, this is very important to note because without affordable housing options we run amok with rising debt and we run amok of being able to attract people to our urban and rural environments. We have all been honest about this. I believe Bill 203 will have a lasting and positive impact on affordable housing across Alberta. Allowing for six-storey residential wood construction sets the stage for the construction community to offer lower cost housing for all Albertans.

Utilizing wood as a construction material also lessens our environmental impact and our overall carbon footprint. To measure this, experts focus on the overall life cycle of a building's materials, from extraction or harvest of raw materials through to manufacturing, transportation, installation, use, maintenance, disposal, and recycling. Mr. Speaker, studies consistently show that wood is far better for the environment than steel or concrete in terms of embodied energy, air and water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The forest industry has reduced waste by optimizing sawmill operations and by using wood chips and sawdust to produce paper and composite products. There are even ways to use waste for fuel for clean bioenergy. In North America wood producers are able to use 99 per cent of every tree that's harvested. That's 99 per cent of every tree that's harvested. These are astounding, positive, renewable factors that will increase the confidence of consumers. According to industry experts tree and forest products play a critical role in helping to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gases. In addition, using wood products that store carbon can minimize our carbon footprint over the long run. Mr. Speaker, this means that wood buildings require less energy to construct and operate over time, resulting in more cost savings for consumers.

In addition to the benefits of lower construction costs, lower carbon footprint, and the facilitation of increasing urban population is added support for Alberta's labour industry. Mr. Speaker, using wood supports people working in Alberta's forest industry. This industry is a major employer in 50 communities across the province and provides an important source of economic diversity for Alberta. Between 2011 and 2015 our forest industry will invest \$1.5 billion into Alberta's economy. This translates into jobs in construction, distribution, and manufacturing and the timely creation of housing for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, many notable jurisdictions have accepted the amendments we speak of today, and I look forward to passing a piece of legislation to provide Albertans with more of the services they need. Such provincial building standards and regulations coincide with national practices. It is time that we extend ourselves to meet best industry practices, following suit with provinces across Canada as well as our neighbours.

Calgary, especially, has been very creative in this. The city of Calgary will be adopting the six-storey standards contained in the 2015 national building code, effectively being the first jurisdiction in the country to do so. These adopted standards for six-storey building codes, since 2009, have brought tremendous feedback

from industry professionals and very public support. Mr. Speaker, it is time that we embrace these same standards.

With that, I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 203 to help prepare Alberta for a lasting and prosperous economy. I'd like to thank the hon. member for sponsoring this initiative in Bill 203, and I look forward to hearing the remainder of this debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, I believe.

**Ms Fenske:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. I know the hon. member's intentions have always been in the best interests of Albertans, as we've heard here time and time again, and I commend him for his ongoing service and dedication to this province and his province's continued record of success. In this season, when we're trying to be naughty or nice, I guess it's all right to speak about knotty today just a little.

Bill 203 proposes to amend the building code regulation to allow wood-constructed buildings to be built to a maximum of six storeys or 18 metres. These construction projects will help build on the success of our thriving forestry industry, an industry that has provided so many people with a sustainable and rewarding place to work. Mr. Speaker, by working with our municipal partners as well as with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Department, I believe that the needs of both our contractors and our forestry advocates will be approached in a balanced and a sensible manner.

Now, our government is and will always be humbled to serve the people of this great province, and this means being responsible stewards of our majestic forests while diversifying our markets at home and abroad. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta building code is modelled on the national building code of Canada, or the NBCC, and recently the NBCC proposed a number of changes to the building code standards. One of the proposed changes would be to allow for the construction of wood buildings exceeding nine metres, which is, of course, one of the main provisions included in Bill 203. It is anticipated that Calgary will be adopting this new standard.

As I stated earlier, there are a number of benefits to passing Bill 203. Firstly, it would mean not only expanding our forestry industry, but also we could promote a more efficient construction industry while reducing red tape. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population is growing. We will see an approximate increase of 2.2 million people in just under three decades. This, of course, could pose a bit of an issue in terms of finding housing that will accommodate Alberta's projected growth. It's no secret why people come to our province. They come to take advantage of our strong economy and to pursue a comfortable life that is fuelled by hard work and prudent fiscal discipline. I believe that what is being proposed in Bill 203 would help with the increased demand for housing, and we must start addressing this potential issue just as soon as possible. Coming from many years of municipal experience, affordable housing has been a topic of conversation time and time again.

Of course, the one factor I want to stress is that of safety. The amendments that have been brought forward by Bill 203 have been thought out thoroughly. In 2012, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, or the CCBFC, reviewed previous requirements that limited the height of wood

buildings to no more than four storeys. A joint task force that included several CCBFC standing committees was established in 2011. They examined four areas: fire protection, emergency response, building and plumbing services, and structural earthquake design. The joint task force group later concluded that height and area limits for buildings constructed using combustible materials could safely be increased to six storeys. This decision did of course come with recommendations to either introduce new and/or modify various measures to ensure the safety of building residents.

Mr. Speaker, when you factor in all the proposed changes in Bill 203 and consider the potential socioeconomic advantages, it seems only natural that our government would support amendments to the Safety Codes Act. It is our responsibility to make sure that we have appropriate infrastructure in place to meet the population demands that our province will soon be facing. I believe that Bill 203 is taking our province in the right direction by addressing this issue.

I will proudly support this bill, and I encourage my hon. colleagues to do so as well. I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for proposing this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I believe that concludes the speaking list.

That being said, would the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne like to close debate at this time?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the members of the Assembly for their outstanding support for Bill 203.

Bill 203 is a practical, Alberta solution to an issue that we're all facing, affordable housing and, in general, the better use of an Alberta product, a sustainable product that we all love and enjoy in our communities. Being raised in a community that's forest dependent, I think it's also fitting that I have this opportunity in the House to promote the use of wood in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's getting close to 5 o'clock. Once again I want to thank all the members that supported this bill in second reading. We'll have a further discussion in Committee of the Whole, and I would ask that we call the question.

Thank you, sir.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved second reading of Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder, in light of the time, if we should not just call it 5 o'clock and move on to private members' motions.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that we now call it 5 o'clock so that we can move on to the next area of business.

[Motion carried]

## Motions Other than Government Motions

### Child Care Policies

504. Mr. Jeneroux moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to review child care policies to ensure that accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans to allow for parents to re-enter the workforce, if they so choose, which will increase personal income tax contributions and address current and future skilled worker gaps in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and open debate on Motion 504. The history behind my decision to bring this motion before the House has its roots in my constituency of Edmonton-South West. Motion 504 takes its bearings from what I have been hearing in conversations with my constituents. The message that keeps coming back to me in the coffee shops, in my office, at community events is a consistent one. Young and new families are frequently hard-pressed to provide adequate child care while simultaneously earning a living for their household.

It's easy to understand why this is the case. Raising young children is a full-time job in its own right, and at the same time it can also be expensive, particularly when there are bills, rent, mortgages, and other costs of living to pay. As a consequence, many families feel a severe strain and are often forced to choose between larger incomes and caring for their children. This is not a comfortable position to be in, Mr. Speaker. The cost of living is substantial, and it's often the case that two incomes are necessary to sustain a family household.

While this government has been doing a great job of supporting families and children, I'm sure we can agree that there's always room for improvement. This is where Motion 504 can begin this conversation, Mr. Speaker. I and our Premier have met with a large number of parents who've been telling us that in this new generation Alberta, supports for child care services ought to be reviewed. All they ask is that we as a government explore our options regarding how we can continue to keep child care affordable and accessible in the years to come.

I know that I do not have to remind the hon. members of this House of the paramount importance of our younger generations, Mr. Speaker. That is readily apparent, but it is always healthy to review how we ensure their safekeeping and invest in their upbringing. After all, these are our future leaders, these are our future decision-makers, and these children are the future of our province. By partnering with families in order to ensure that they have the resources necessary to raise their children, we can also accomplish far more than we might initially expect.

It is a quite common scenario that a parent who might otherwise wish to be in the workforce is compelled to stay home to care for their young children. This could be for any number of reasons, whether because child care services are not readily accessible or because costs are prohibitive. The point is that these are able-bodied and enthusiastic adults who could be contributing to the province's economy if the situation were different. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is worth our while to investigate ways in which we can assist these parents in re-entering the workforce.

In a nutshell, Motion 504, if passed, would contribute to the dialogue of bolstering both dependable child care for working parents and Alberta's workforce. Consequently, this holds promise for increasing the earning potential of households while also expanding the province's income tax base.

5:00

Under the present situation the Ministry of Human Services provides financial assistance to eligible lower income families for



purposes of child care. This assistance manifests in the form of licensed daycare and preschool programs, licensed family child care, approved family day homes, and approved early childhood development programs.

The maximum rates provided by the ministry vary according to the type of program being funded and the age of the child being provided care. The child must be 12 years of age or younger. The parent must be currently working, attending school, looking for work, or have special needs, and the parents or child must also be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Alberta.

We also support children with disabilities through the inclusive child care program, and Human Services contributes to child care specifically for families with children with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very good track record, and we can take pride in what we do to support child care services in Alberta, but there is a conversation to be had regarding: what else can we do, and what can we do better? Based on what I hear every day, whether it be at my girls' day care or in coffee shops or community events, this is a conversation families want us to have, and that alone makes it worth while. This is a conversation that Motion 504 is to begin. It doesn't end here, but we have to have the courage to assess what we're doing, how we're doing it, and what opportunities we have and owe to future generations.

I would seriously encourage all hon. members to support this motion. Let's build on our past successes, explore new avenues for quality child care, and assist parents who want to enter the workforce. Let's begin that conversation now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Wilson:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and address Motion 504. I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing it forward. Just for the sake of reading it into the record one more time, I will do just that. The motion says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review child care policies to ensure that accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans to allow for parents to re-enter the workforce, if they so choose, which will increase personal income tax contributions and address current and future skilled worker gaps in Alberta.

As I first saw this, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but think and reflect back on our former Premier, Premier Hancock. In his role as Government House Leader if he were to see that motion, he would tell us all that we should simply defeat it based on its length and the fact that you're asking multiple things to be done. It should be succinct. It should be concise. Nevertheless, I'm going to support it, and I'll tell you why.

I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing it forward. It's an important issue. It affects the lives of many families in Alberta, and it's not a simple issue by any description. I just would like to talk a little bit about some of the challenges that families face and that we as policy-makers face while we look for ways to support the child care industry in Alberta.

One big part of the problem is simply having enough spaces. Around two-thirds of the child care centres in Calgary currently have a waiting list. We've heard stories of couples getting on waiting lists for a daycare space before they are even expecting. It's not only that we are short spaces, but the larger problem has to do with where they are located. Provincially I've heard that our utilization is around 80 per cent, which would mean that there are spaces out there, but these spaces aren't where parents need them.

A 2011 StatsCan study showed that the leading reason given by parents for the choice of daycare was location. This more than any other factor determines how a family decides on a child care arrangement. It's important to remember this when we think about whether there actually are child care options for families. If you had to drive over two hours to drop your child off before you went to work, is that a good choice for either the child or the family? Well, of course not. We need to remember that these realities drive many of the decisions that people make, whether they're going to work or stay at home.

A second major issue when it comes to child care is affordability, and I don't want to suggest that this government is not doing anything to make child care more affordable. There are some good programs operating right now. But child care is very expensive. A recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives looked at the picture of child care affordability across Canada, and while we are not the least affordable here in Alberta, the information is still worth noting. In Edmonton child care costs about 24 per cent of the average woman's income. In Calgary it's 26 per cent. So child care is a very significant expense for most families, and we need to put our energy and resources into getting the right balance.

There are many ideas out there for addressing the problem. Right now there are subsidies for families with incomes under \$50,000. There are also programs to encourage providers to keep spaces open like the wage top-up program and the grants designed to attract more workers to the industry. For a few years there was an expansion grant given for operators creating a new spot, a program that recently ended. This review could examine the program in detail and help determine whether it should be continued. Sometimes there is work that can be done in partnership with municipalities to make it easier and more attractive for operators to open a daycare or an early childhood learning centre. Figuring out where the barriers are for creating spaces is key and helps address the overall shortage.

We have other related issues when it comes to providing good care for children while their parents are at work. Many child care operators in the province don't care for infants, and even finding spaces for toddlers can be a challenge. Finding a spot for a child with special needs can be an absolute nightmare. For example, families in Alberta with an autistic child can have a very hard time. They must juggle the therapy, the care, and the needs of the child with the child care during the day, which means caregivers who can accommodate those transportation needs and those special needs. On top of this, special-needs children can require complex strategies, and finding a caregiver who is the right fit can be very difficult.

I know of a family with an autistic child who had to transfer to three different day homes in as many months. One of the problems came up due to his transportation needs during the day. After finding one solution that seemed ideal, the next caregiver found that his socialization was more than her home was equipped to handle. This change was not good for the child and was very stressful for his parents.

I want to be clear that I'm not a fan of and do not support a universal system. We don't have to have a Quebec-style program. I don't think that that is the fiscally responsible way to go about solving this problem. I don't think that putting that level of resources into care for children is fair for families who decide to stay home with their children or to make other arrangements such as having a mother-in-law or others stay at home with the children.

We don't have to move forward to a universal system in order to acknowledge that our system needs work and/or improvement.

There are many different philosophies and ideas for how we can incentivize enough good-quality child care spaces in the neighbourhoods where they are needed. The answers are complex, making this a perfect issue for a motion like this one, which suggests starting with a review. We need Alberta-specific, up-to-date information about our system and a very clear, thorough examination of current and past policy.

I want to thank the member again for this motion and the chance to rise and support it in the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak today with respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West's motion. This is a very, very important discussion, and I thank him for raising it here in the Chamber.

As you all know, Mr. Speaker, we are so blessed to live in a dynamic and rapidly growing province. We're welcoming people from across the country and around the world to join us as proud Albertans, and people are accepting that invitation, as we all know.

At the beginning of 2014 Alberta's population was estimated to be at nearly 4.1 million – so we can only imagine what it is now – up almost 22,000 people from October 2013. We know that Alberta continues to lead the provinces in population growth, and at just 5 per cent our unemployment rate remains the second lowest in the country.

For parents with young children who become new Albertans, they likely don't have the luxury of bringing their child care provider with them. If both parents work outside the home, child care is a primary need for which there is always demand. The Alberta government believes that parents should have a choice in daycare. During the last year licensed and approved child care spaces have increased by approximately 4,700 spaces, for a total of approximately 100,000 spaces across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the government does not create child care spaces. However, the subsidies this government provides create the opportunity for increased economic growth. Not only do these subsidies make it easier for parents to re-enter the workforce; the demand for child care creates a unique opportunity for new Albertans. They can even become child care providers themselves. They have the opportunity to be entrepreneurs and small-business owners.

My ministry offers a wealth of information on our website to help parents find child care and for potential providers to learn more about licensing and accreditation. Similar to other provinces, Alberta does not cap parent fees that are charged by child care operators. Operators set fees based on where their program is located, their operational costs, and the level of service their programs offer. Parents should be aware that while there are many child care providers out there, not all of them are licensed or accredited. Accredited child care providers have demonstrated standards of excellence that show they provide high-quality child care over and above licensing regulations for children from birth to 12 years of age.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, it's also our priority to help lower income families access quality child care instead of providing an across-the-board subsidy for all income levels. As mentioned by previous hon. members, families can earn up to \$50,000 per year and still qualify for the maximum subsidy, and partial subsidies are

available, depending on a family's income and the child's age. The subsidy is targeted to those who need it the most. In 2013, for example, families receiving the full subsidy paid an average of \$268 per month.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 80,000 children enrolled in child care programs in our province. Of these children, 25,000 of them – close to 1 in 3 – receive a full or partial child care subsidy. Of those 25,000 children, more than 8 out of 10 receive a full subsidy. I believe the subsidy makes it possible for parents who either need to or want to work to re-enter the workforce.

In addition to the subsidy, Alberta has one of the lowest personal income tax rates in Canada, and we offer parents the family employment tax credit to help families with the cost of raising children. Again, Mr. Speaker, low-income Albertans also benefit from the provincial tax system with a low personal income tax rate and with the highest basic and spousal amounts in Canada. With the Alberta family employment tax credit a family of four can earn up to \$47,670 before paying provincial income taxes. It's about families keeping more money in their own pockets.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's motion today, that we are doing many things across government to support the growth of healthy families, but with more and more families moving here, this motion, this conversation, is absolutely critical. I encourage and look forward to more conversation on this matter.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Hon. members, I have Edmonton-Calder, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Little Bow for the moment.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, just to put it forward straightaway, the Alberta New Democrats do support this motion. We support families and advocate for our youngest Albertans.

It's interesting to note that Public Interest Alberta recently released a report showing the dire state of child care here in this province. It showed that we are facing a worsening crisis. Alberta ranked 6 out of 10 provinces in per capita spending on child care, and over the last six years the number of child care spaces has not even been close to keeping up with the number of children in Alberta under the age of six. The percentage of mothers in the workforce with preschool children who did not have access to child care increased 62 per cent. Subsidies are not keeping pace with the increased costs of child care as well. In sum, we have a problem.

While Alberta faces an increasingly severe crisis, other provinces are taking the lead on addressing the needs of Canadians when it comes to child care. On November 18 the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, for example, passed a motion to commit to working on a federal New Democrat proposal for a universal child care system for just \$15 a day for all families that require it. In Manitoba this province provided a targeted subsidy to make child care more affordable for low-income families. In 2008 Manitoba had the lowest child care fees outside of Quebec and in 2007 reduced the nonsubsidized daily fee that was paid for parents from \$2.40 to \$2. In 2007 they increased the subsidy eligibility as well by 13 per cent, regulating the maximum fees to ensure affordability for middle-income families. The province of Quebec not only offers affordable child care, with \$7.30 daycare for Quebecers with an income of less than \$50,000, but also through regulation offers parents high-quality care for their

children as well. This PC government is failing to deal with our child care crisis here in the province of Alberta, and that's why the motion put forward by the hon. member is very timely and very appropriate.

On November 20 when asked about child care and the need for more spaces and affordable options for Albertan families, this government responded by saying that 80,000 children are enrolled in child care programs and 25,000 children receive some sort of subsidy. When asked later that day about the crisis-level shortage of spaces for infants and special-needs children, this government responded by talking about the ability of parents to choose child care providers. It is clear that in this House this government has failed to answer our questions on child care. They have failed to make any real promises to this House about addressing the child care crisis which exists here in the province.

Finally, the promises that they have made, specifically during the election in which most members opposite were elected, seem to have been broken. In 2012 the Redford government made the following promises in regard to child care. She said that a re-elected PC government would continue to deliver new and increased funding to Alberta families to offset the cost increases and changes to the provincial child care subsidy program. This is a promise that the PC government broke. In 2013 the government of Alberta eliminated the quality enhancement grant to child care centres. In response, child care operators had to increase fees and/or cut programs.

The Public Interest Alberta report on early childhood education and care: despite increases in subsidies to child care, the difference between the average cost of child care for low-income families and subsidies offered by this government rose to \$172 a month for infants and \$180 a month for older children. This amounts to an increase of \$115 a month for infants and \$28 a month for older children.

Commitments to child care are just more PC broken promises. Unlike this government, which has shown time and time again that they put some other interests ahead of Alberta families, the Alberta New Democrats are committed to making real change and making life more affordable for Albertans. We support the creation of (a) more spaces, (b) more affordable child care, (c) more publicly funded spaces which offer quality daycare programs, (d) developing a plan to deal with children age six to 12 in addition to pre-school-aged children, (e) supporting the accreditation of facilities and the certification of child care workers, and (f) ensuring quality standards that are based on national and international best practices and regularly inspecting facilities.

Mr. Speaker, in sum, certainly this motion is a great opportunity to start to speak about these issues. We know that affordable child care, not just in different jurisdictions around this country but around the world, is a cornerstone to building a more equal and just society for all and a more stable economy, to creating more opportunities for people to work and to be independent, and to ultimately have quality places not just to mind our children but to help to educate them and to build a stronger future for everyone.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

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

**Ms Fenske:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to Motion 504, affordable child care services, brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. Child care in this province is critical for the growth and the success of

Alberta. There are many small towns and villages that are within the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. We've had this discussion with many of the mayors, how important it is to be able to have appropriate child care in order to attract people to their communities. By attracting people to the communities, that attracts business and generates a dynamic that is so important for rural Alberta.

Motion 504 is looking to review the government's child care policies in efforts to grow the province's workforce. I think some of the things that it must consider will be the flexibility of choice. It must also find the balance to be able to meet the Minister of Finance's obligation to balance the budget. I think the third thing that it needs to also consider is parental rights, that parents have the right to make their decisions as to what kinds of services they require for their children. All of that has to form part of a very valuable discussion, and we must as a government look to see what the gaps are in the services that we are providing already.

**5:20**

Motion 504 is looking to go forward and to review that discussion, but we already are doing some things, as the Minister of Human Services mentioned. Currently we assist lower income families with various services, including daycare; out of school care programs, including after school care programs; approved family day homes; an extended hours child care subsidy for parents working evenings and weekends; a kin child care funding program; and support for stay-at-home parents. Children, of course, must be 12 years of age or younger for these programs and cannot yet be attending grade 7. Families must have one or both parents working, attending school, actively looking for work, or with special needs. They must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident living in Alberta. Finally, families may apply for funding if they have their children enrolled in an approved early childhood development program or a licensed preschool.

If families meet these criteria, they can receive some level of funding from the Ministry of Human Services for the following: licensed daycare centres, licensed group family child care, approved family day homes, licensed out of school care centres, licensed preschools, and approved early childhood development programs. Mr. Speaker, these are just high-level examples of what the government already provides to hard-working parents.

Currently our government supports children with disabilities through the inclusive child care program, and Motion 504 could urge the government to build on these initiatives. Mr. Speaker, this program creates flexibility to meet the individual needs of children with special needs or disabilities within the child care settings. Support may include training for child care staff, consultation on programming or inclusion, resource and referral information, and funding for additional staff. The family support for children with disabilities, or FSCD, program is an important voluntary initiative run by our government to protect youth. The FSCD program works in partnership with families to provide supports and services based on each child's and family's individual needs. In addition, all services are available to eligible families of children with disabilities until the child turns 18 years of age.

In order to ensure an appropriate and high-quality impact of the program, families are required to complete an individualized family support plan, or an IFSP, as part of their assessment. I think our world lives on acronyms. The purpose of the IFSP is to assist families in determining goals for their child's development and participation in the home, school, and community. The FSCD representative works together with the family to complete that IFSP. The IFSP is used to record a family's goals and priorities for

their child, strategies to meet these goals, individual responsibilities, and timelines.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite apparent that the Ministry of Human Services is already placing a high priority on assisting Alberta's parents in finding suitable child care. In addition, the Ministry of Human Services has also worked with Mount Royal University and Grant MacEwan University as community partners. This initiative will develop a curriculum for child care educators who work in centre-based child care and family day homes dealing with children aged zero to five years. The curriculum framework is based on a holistic view of child development. It will seek to encompass all areas of a child's growth and learning. It will build a common language across diverse delivery settings, focusing around the importance of play in early learning, emergent program planning, and responsive care.

Mr. Speaker, there are two phases to the project. The first is the development of a draft curriculum framework that is aligned with the content and values and approach of postsecondary training institutions as well as the early learning and child care sector at large. The second phase consists of piloting the curriculum framework and supports in selected early learning and child care sites across this province.

Motion 504 asks the government to review child care, which is an important issue for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, one of our government's initiatives is to build strong communities that are fostered by collaborative spirit. The programs that I've just listed provide these opportunities for parents to access child care. It allows all families the opportunity to do what is best for their children. The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West is to be commended for bringing forward this topic for consideration and discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion 504, a review of child care. I, too, commend the member for raising this issue. It's certainly one that I hear a lot on in Calgary-Mountain View, where there are a lot of young families struggling to meet the ever-accelerating costs of living in the big city, where we have not managed to bring under control the spiral that comes with a boom-bust economy. Increasingly, even my own children are struggling with child care and the demands of modern lives.

We're looking for three things – affordability, quality, and accessibility – and we're not providing that for up to a third to almost half of the people who would utilize it if they had the opportunity and who, according to some of the studies, would be paying much more back to society than subsidized daycare would. The evidence from Quebec is that the income taxes gained from having more people employed would actually pay for the whole costs of subsidized child care.

I mean, it raises questions, again, about just how committed this government is to prevention. We see children falling through the cracks in terms of their early childhood development, their learning abilities, their emotional and behavioural challenges that are not identified because they're not in situations where people can actually identify and provide interventions. We're setting ourselves up for more and more and more costs and lost potential through our health care system, which shouldn't be approaching that at all if prevention was in place; for more and more supports needed in schools when they get into schools and haven't had the

preparation in early childhood; and, certainly, some safety issues around especially single moms who don't quite have the supports they need and are trying to do both, work a little bit outside the home and somehow cope with the demands in the home.

At this point it would be a huge step if we would simply address the backlog of those who very seriously want to and can provide some aspect of the funding for their own child care, but at some point the idea would be a universal child care program.

First steps first, though, and I think the discussion here is an important one. Surely we can help reduce family stresses, mental illness, risk taking, family violence, and, obviously, poverty if we take seriously the commitment that we have said that we've made to the sustainable well-being of children and their educational opportunity and achievement. These are investments for our future, not expenses. Again, the ideological blindness over here with taxes that don't reflect a fairness and a revenue stream that can actually provide for some of these supports is shocking when it's been going on for so long and so many have said that we need more resources to do what's right for Albertans, to ensure that we invest and reduce the costs of all the breakdowns in families and communities that we see because they simply don't have enough supports.

The early childhood mapping project. Again, a funding cut there after five years of tremendous work identifying the developmental needs of children in those critical years under six and identifying what they need and identifying progress or lack of progress in that childhood population. That project was cut. It speaks of a government that's more interested in financial mean-spiritedness and holding onto an ideology of low, impossible taxes rather than one that is being generous and supportive and preventative in their approach to some of our most vulnerable. And I'm including the working poor and those just above, in the low- and middle-income brackets, that are struggling to meet their needs.

Surely 4,000 new spaces in child care is progress but not when you consider that we've got double that number in terms of needs. Let's deal with the reality, and that means not only getting people accessible child care and early childhood enrichment; it also means making sure that that is affordable.

So I welcome these opportunities to discuss but more than discuss to hopefully move to some policy actions and some investment, that are so critically needed in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Hawkwood.

**Mr. Donovan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak on the motion that the Member for Edmonton-South West has brought forward. I think the key part is that "accessible, high-quality, and affordable child care is available for all Albertans." Child care is key to rural Alberta, a riding that I represent. Being a strong advocate for rural Alberta, I can tell you that that the key for rural Alberta is to make sure that we have all the same things that all of our urban friends have also. As the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville stated before, one of the key things is to support this because it does support rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, child care facilities in Vulcan, for instance, are one I can relate to. During a difficult time in my life, when I was raising my two boys by myself, the Vulcan Daycare Society was there for me. It was key and crucial as a single parent to have a safe place for my kids to go, and I can tell you that they had great service there. If you want a good system, you have to sometimes

step up, so I ended up being the president of that society for a little while. There are great people advocating there, and there are great people working there. The quality was second to none. It was a challenge sometimes on the affordability side for some people, that were obviously a little more challenged on income, to make the bills all work out.

One of the things there was making sure that we always had fundraisers and things like that. We did casinos. We did all kinds of things. I can tell you that the quality was always good there, and the accessibility was good. There was sometimes the challenge, though, of enough spaces for everybody.

I applaud the Member for Edmonton-South West for bringing this forward because I think, like with most things, the system is working well, but you always need to review it and keep on top of how things can change.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I will be supporting this motion. I want to thank the member for bringing it forward, and I ask all the other members of this Assembly to also support it. I think it's something key and crucial to keeping Alberta in first place.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Luan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to rise today to support Motion 504, proposed by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. I want to point out that the motion seeks to review the practice. It didn't specifically say to increase or decrease the subsidy and so forth. I want to bring it back to why I'm so much in favour of that review.

As you know, lots of young families live in our province. Particularly, some of those live in Calgary-Hawkwood. We have lots of need for access to affordable child care in order to have parents who can get out to work and pay income taxes for us. In the meantime we are at a time when the oil price is going down to under \$70, and we're in a very, very difficult time to choose and decide what programs to support and how to spend our money.

The motion from the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West is talking about seeking to review the best practice. I wanted to congratulate him for being thoughtful in proposing this motion. To me, when we have to live within our means and we have to come up with innovative solutions to meet the increased demand, that's something I always applaud a member for doing. That's something good not only for Calgary-Hawkwood but for the whole province of Alberta.

This motion brought us the conversation of: what are other people doing? I have two models here from different provinces that I'd like to share with the hon. colleagues in this House in the spirit of looking for the best practice. One of the models is done by Ontario. Ontario's child care subsidy helps eligible families pay for child care. The Ontario government, municipal governments, and First Nation communities share the cost of the program. In Ontario parents can qualify for the child care subsidy if their child is under 12 years old, is in a licensed child care program, or is a school-aged child enrolled in a recreation program.

The amount parents pay for their child care depends on the family's adjusted net income. There are grants and other supports available from the provincial and federal governments that can help families with the costs of raising children. The Ontario child benefit, abbreviated as OCB, is financial support where low-income families, whether they're working or not, may receive help to provide for their children. Depending on the family income, applicants can qualify for this program if they are the primary caregiver of a child under 18 or are residents of Ontario and have

filed and had assessed their previous year's income tax return as have their spouse or common-law partner.

Motion 504 is urging the government to conduct a review, which may result in looking at the practices of other provinces. Ontario has additional funds for child care, and the Ontario child care supplement for working families is a tax-free monthly payment that helps families pay for the costs of raising children under seven years of age. With the introduction of Ontario's model in July 2008, payments were reduced in part by the OCB amount received. When the OCB benefit level reached \$1,100 in July 2009, most two-parent families no longer needed the benefits anymore, so that was their cap level. This program helps families who are low- to mid-income single or two-parent families, who have one stay-at-home parent, or who have one or both studying or in training. Applicants apply for OCCS if they live in Ontario, receive a Canada child tax benefit, have children under the age of seven born prior to July 1, 2009, and have a proper income level that qualifies for this program.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as a fiscal conservative in Alberta, Ontario's practice may not be the most beneficial one for us to consider. However, it would not hurt to have a robust discussion of what we can do and come up with something that is made in Alberta. If Motion 504 was to be taken into consideration by this government, an important part of the review is to study other forms of government child care relationships and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

The second model that was available for comparison is Saskatchewan's. They have a program called the child care subsidy, or CCS. It is a monthly assistance program that helps Saskatchewan families meet the costs of licensed child care. CCS is provided directly to child care facilities to reduce the fees charged to eligible parents. CCS varies; the scale ranges from low-income to high-income assistance. To be eligible, individuals must have custody of a child or children under the age of 13, receive care in a licensed facility, be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada, be residents of Saskatchewan, and have a valid reason for care of the children. They list a whole bunch of reasons deemed as valid. For instance, employment or self-employment, attending educational training in an accredited institution, or looking for work has to be one of the reasons.

CCS amounts are determined using a calculation that takes into account gross family income, family size, the age of the child, the location of the child care facility, and actual fees charged. Families with income below the designated thresholds may qualify for maximum aid. A family with income above those thresholds may still qualify for a reduced amount. Families receiving income assistance through the Saskatchewan assistance program or a transitional employment allowance may be eligible for benefits sufficient to cover the entire fee. Maximum amounts are provided to a family with a monthly income below \$1,640. This threshold is increased by \$100 for each additional child under 18. For example, families with two children under 18 qualify for a maximum benefit of \$1,740. Thresholds for families with more than three children are increased similarly without an upper limit.

So the question is: is the Saskatchewan model suited to us? Well, I have to say that I don't know, but what begs the question is the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West, which is: given the fiscal constraint, given the rising need, given the best practices other provinces have, what is the made-in-Alberta solution for it?

I look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate on Motion 504. Hopefully, something creative can come as our solution. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:40

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

Are there others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

**Mr. Jeneroux:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of Motion 504 is to promote and continue the discussion on affordable child care services that are easily accessible for all Albertans. We've heard loud and clear that young families often face the difficult situation of caring for their young children while also needing to make a living and establish careers. By exploring new ways of supporting affordable child care, we could make great progress in strengthening families and nurturing future generations of Albertans. Besides this, through innovative means we could also continue to strengthen Alberta's workforce. The more Albertans we have employable, the stronger our economic outlook.

By passing Motion 504, we win a dual victory, Mr. Speaker. We affirm the importance of strong and cohesive families, and we

will fortify the province's pool of employable working adults. Any support we can lend to families as they raise their children and advance their careers is worthy of our consideration. We have a great track record on this front. Let us see if we can improve further. Families are the backbone of this province, and when they prosper, we prosper.

As such, I encourage all hon. members to join me in supporting Motion 504, calling for the exploration of affordable child care supports. One gesture, one conversation can make a difference, and I believe we owe it to our children to try.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In consideration of the closure of that piece of business and in consideration of the time I move that we adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:43 p.m.]

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