



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 16, 2015

Issue 20

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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

Progressive Conservative: 70 Wildrose: 5 Alberta Liberal: 5 New Democrat: 4 Independent: 1 Vacant: 2

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear Lord and Great Creator, we ask for Your guidance as we begin this week of work on behalf of those whom we are privileged to serve in our Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, led by Robert Clark.

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 very much. Let us be seated, please.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests in the galleries, including the Speaker's gallery, today. In a moment we'll begin with the Premier's introduction, but could I ask all of you with guests to be as brief as possible so that we can get all 22 introductions in.

The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Selçuk Ünal, who is the ambassador of the Republic of Turkey. His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Hakan Cengiz, counsellor from the embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa, and also by Kenan Tan, who is the honorary consul general of the Republic of Turkey here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and the Republic of Turkey have benefited from a long-standing trade and investment relationship. Ambassador Ünal's visit is a great opportunity for us to celebrate those ties and to build, in fact, on current ties while exploring new areas of co-operation, in particular in a variety of sectors such as energy development and agriculture. We're confident that the future will bring diverse opportunities for even more collaboration between our province and Turkey, not only in terms of trade and investment but also in terms of cultural and educational exchanges, which we value immensely.

Our esteemed guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I now ask that they please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, and welcome to our guests.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us move on to school groups, starting with Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you students from the Fort Saskatchewan Christian school. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Elaine Baillie, Mr. Uve Knaak, and Mrs. Deborah Pinchuk. They are here to learn about things that happen in the Legislature, but one of the other things that they find very important is to pray for the Members of this Legislative Assembly. I would ask them all to rise right now and to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine, Mavis Giant from the Saddle Lake Christian school. Along with her she's brought two students, Abby, who wants to be a registered nurse, as well as Madison, who wants to get into politics and become the chief of the reserve there. I'd ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly eight grades 4 to 9 students from Slave Lake Koinonia Christian school and their chaperones Ms Jasmine Light, Mr. Marc Boissonneault, Mr. Dan Brown, and Mrs. Beatrice Brown. Since choices of where students get an education were made here in this province, this school has been so successful in graduating students, usually with high marks. I know that they are here with other Christian schools, and one of the things that they do value in common is to pray for all leaders. I ask that the students and the chaperones, who are seated in the public gallery, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very clever group of students from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask you to keep a secret, that this is my favourite school in the fabulous constituency. I would ask the grade 6 class from John A. McDougall to stand and receive the warm welcome. Their teacher is Ms Veronica Chong, and with them is Mrs. Lily Welsh as their parent helper. They are standing. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three fantastic grades 8 and 9 students from Cornerstone Christian School in my constituency of Medicine Hat. They are Rhea Nayak, Cambria Malcolm, and Korina Donnelly. These students are joined by their awesome principal, Sandy Sergeant. I know they pray for each of us. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests are not here – they are from Concordia University College in my constituency – neither are my speaking notes here, but I invite all members to give them a warm welcome. They will be arriving later during question period. We'll be unable to revert at that time, so if we could just give them a little round right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions if that's all right. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of students, parents, teachers from Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. They are participating at this moment in a tour of the Legislature but will join us here at 2 o'clock. Touring with the students is their teacher, Amanda Gathercole, and parent helpers Glen Saunders, Becky Poulsen, Jaime Pipke, Nadine Benoit, Angela Erickson, Bradly Balfour, Sarah Payne, Kerri Colwell, and Jocelyn Callihoo. When they come at 2, we'll wave at them and give them the warm welcome of the Assembly then.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would also be pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly President Helen Rice from the AUMA; Mayor Steve Christie; John McGowan, chief executive officer of the AUMA; and President Al Kemmere from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. I'm thrilled they are here for the introduction today of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. I am proud of the long-standing partnership between our government, our Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and our municipal partners and associations. Please, if they would rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park and Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you students from St. Dominic school, located in my riding, Edmonton-Manning. They are accompanied by their teacher, Luisa Molenaar, and parent helper Angela Wright. I'm pleased to see these wonderful and dynamic students be part of the School at the Legislature program this week. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group with the Association of Christian Schools, eight of Strathcona's brightest and best with the Strathcona Christian Academy here today visiting the Legislature. They're here with their teacher, Mr. Symonds Botchey, who tells me he just joined Strathcona Christian Academy this year and is very pleased to be there and very proud of this group of eight students he's with today. We'd also like to extend the warm welcome of this Assembly and have them rise. They're in the public gallery.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the invaluable gems in Calgary-Lougheed is Glenmore Christian Academy. I truly enjoy visiting with their students, staff, and parents, and I'm absolutely

honoured that they're joining us here today. GCA has built a dynamic Christian environment dedicated to excellence in learning and life development. Their focus is to raise leaders who will become responsible citizens and world-view thinkers who are committed to Christian service. It's a pleasure to introduce eight of their fine students, who have made a special trip to Edmonton to pray for us as provincial leaders here in this building. The students are joined by parent volunteer Debbie Mohamed and Tasha Schindel, chair of the parent council. I'll ask our guests to stand now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this fine Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other school or education groups?

Okay. Let's move on to other important guests, starting with the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, followed by Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Scott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you the finest and most dedicated student leaders in all of Canada, representing more than 265,000 postsecondary students. I will ask them to stand as they are introduced: from the Council of Alberta University Students Navneet Khinda, Cam McCoy, William Lau, Ray Khan, Erik Queenan, Seija Roggeveen, Levi Nilson, Chris Hollingsworth, and executive director Beverly Eastham; from the Alberta Students' Executive Council, ASEC, Tyler Ludwig, Alex Willkie, Bailey Daines, Justin Nand, Shannon Peacocke, Hasib Baig, Joshua Bettle, Kristen George, Cody Weger, Thomas Ridgeway, acting executive director Teresa Currie, and Alberta campus mental health innovation project manager Jessica Turowski. Please give these student leaders a very warm welcome.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful father who has made the effort and spent the money to bring his children – his daughters Breanna, 14, and Brooklyn, 10, and his son Jordan – here from Lethbridge. It is a hike, and few young people are lucky enough to make it from Lethbridge. Dwayne Lesko's dental lab business and my constituency office were side by side, and I have watched he and his wife, Heidi, raise this amazing young family. They have wanted to visit the Legislature and watch us in action, especially while I was still here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by the Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you two visitors who reside in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. Seated in the public gallery are Laurier and Doris Ouellette from Girouxville. Mr. and Mrs. Ouellette have lived in my constituency for over 70 years. Laurier grew up working on his father's farm and owned bees for over 20 years before buying his farm 30 years ago. Doris has worked within the local school system as well as a number of local businesses over the years. Together they're very active members of the community. This is their first time visiting the Legislature Building. More importantly, though, Mr. and Mrs. Ouellette are the proud grandparents of Danielle Seymour, one of our pages, who is in the Chamber today. As many of you know, Danielle is a first-year political science student at the University of Alberta, and this is her third year working as a page for us. I would ask all three of them to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you some very special constituents of mine that are seated in the public gallery. They're all members of the Athabasca United church. We have Mavis Jacobs, Wally Cummings, and Dan Dennis, who are all members of the Athabasca Rotary Club as am I. We also have Monica Rosborough, who is the minister of the Athabasca United church; Marion Kadikoff, who has been nominated for one of the 2015 minister's seniors service awards; and Cam Dierker. They're here today to meet with me and to provide an overview of the Athabasca area seniors memory projects. I'd like to ask the group to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with the greatest of honour that I rise before you today, sir, to introduce the farm manager for Strankman Farms. This young gentleman at 24 years old knows the value of a verbal contract. He is my son Jay Strankman. I believe he's behind me in the gallery here, and I hope he will now rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Reid and Joyce Hamula, constituents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Reid wrote to me in January, a letter that I'll table later today, about the difficulty of living as an AISH recipient who has his CPP disability deducted from his monthly benefits. Reid has been living with one arm since the 1970s and endured a workplace injury in late 2012. Contrary to the advice of his GP the WCB has cut off his entitlement. As a recipient of AISH and CPPD he lives on \$1,300 a month. If he were able to work, he could make up to \$1,950 as an AISH recipient. I invited him here today to help raise awareness about the unfair PC policy in AISH and WCB programs. I'll now ask Reid and Joyce to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five wonderful, outstanding Albertans from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. With us today are J.S. Ryu, director of public affairs; Marc Workman, manager of advocacy; and three CNIB champions: Dudley Hanks, Rob Inskip, and Crystal Boyde. Mr. Hanks is also my boss because he lives in Edmonton-Mill Woods. I would request they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, I see you're signalling me that your guests have already been introduced, so let us move on to Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you and to all members of the Assembly a very good friend. When I first met him, it was on Twitter, and he called himself the Kaylinator. Then a short time

later I met him as Captain Bradley. He's been a reservist and a cadet instructor for multiple years, and he was an award winner of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal. Now he's just a great volunteer and a great friend. If Kaylin Bradley could please rise and if members could give him the normal warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mention the great work being done by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, some members of which I introduced earlier. Today there are close to 53,000 Albertans living with blindness or partial sight along with over 630,000 Albertans who live with a major eye disease. Unfortunately, due to aging those numbers are expected to increase by 30 per cent in the next 10 years. To help those individuals, the CNIB provides a broad range of rehab programming, community-based supports in six offices across Alberta.

1:50

On February 23 I met a group of CNIB champions, clients of CNIB and their family members, who have been personally impacted by vision loss. Hearing their stories of overcoming those obvious challenges associated with being visually impaired was truly inspirational. The champions also expressed their gratitude for the ongoing support CNIB receives from this government, in particular the ministries of Human Services and Health. As a member of government caucus I'm looking forward to working with CNIB to ensure that every visually impaired Albertan is provided with the tools and the skills they need to succeed and to overcome their challenges.

I would like to again commend them on the great work they are doing along with many other organizations in this province who continue to confirm that the strength of Alberta is in its people, including those who live with disabilities yet showcase their tremendous ability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, 35 seconds for the question, 35 seconds for the answer. Let's go on with Calgary-Fish Creek, who is also the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, for your first main set of questions.

Long-term Care Beds for Seniors

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Make an announcement, put up a sign, and walk away. They do it with schools, and now they're doing it with seniors' beds. Last week hundreds of new seniors' beds were announced, but nobody can say where the beds will go, when they'll be built, or where the money is to staff them. In fact, an AHS vice-president said: cost isn't actually what we're focused on yet, and answers won't be available until April or May. To the Minister of Health. You're giving seniors and their families false hope. This is clearly just campaigning with Alberta's money. When will you stop?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, either the Minister of Health or the Minister of Seniors can speak to this, but in terms of Alberta under new management the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health set about with a pre-existing budget envelope of \$180 million to build 1,500 senior citizen care spaces. They have, through an RFP process administered by these two ministers, resulted in 2,600 units being delivered to seniors in this province.

Mrs. Forsyth: All right, Premier. Here's a question to under new management. Minister, AHS says that the locations of these beds haven't even been finalized yet. In fact, nobody can say where these beds are, if they're new, or whether these beds were previously closed, and now on the eve of an election they're being promised to be reopened. Hospitals are packed with seniors who need long-term care nursing beds, surgeries are being cancelled, and ER wait times are skyrocketing. Just some straight answers, please. Since you took office in October, how many net – net, Premier – new long-term care nursing beds have been built and put into operation, and where are they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We committed in September, October to 750 new beds, of which 466 would be done by September. We've moved 303 people into those beds across the province of Alberta. We'll continue to do that. With the able leadership of the Minister of Seniors we're continuing. We will build more.

Mrs. Forsyth: Are those long-term care nursing beds, Minister?
There have been dozens of announcements within the last month alone promising new seniors' beds. An election is on the horizon, and quite literally every second day this government makes a new promise with new numbers, new timelines, and no plan to deliver on them. So let's make it easy. Minister, on March 31, 2014, there were 14,370 long-term care nursing beds in operation. Exactly how many long-term care nursing beds are in operation today?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, once again, we committed to adding 750 new beds. The Minister of Seniors is allowing us to even add more. We think we'll be over 1,000. We committed to adding 466 before the end of the year, which will be done by September, and we've added 303 of those numbers by now.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Still no answer under new management, Mr. Speaker.

Deaths of Children in Care

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. An internal report commissioned by the Minister of Human Services says that the decisions to investigate the deaths of children in care are often arbitrary and without proper guidance in place. Minister, every death of a child in care is tragic and deserves to be investigated and reported. Why is this not happening?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the death of any single child is one too many. The death of any child in care in this province is investigated by the Chief Medical Examiner, and the death of any child in care is investigated within the minister's department. Of course, if the Chief Medical Examiner so recommends, there is also a fatality inquiry that is convened. We are all concerned about this. These deaths are investigated, and the public needs to be aware of that.

Mrs. Forsyth: The report recommends that all child deaths should be reviewed like the Premier said. Last year the Child and Youth Advocate was given the mandate to review child deaths when in the public interest but not the resources. I think Albertans would argue that reviewing all deaths of children in government care would be in the best public interest as the Premier said. To the Premier: this report says that all child deaths should be investigated, so why did you order members of your caucus to withhold the resources the Child and Youth Advocate needs to investigate all children's deaths?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I'm sure every single member in this House is concerned about this. The death of any child who is in care in this province is a concern to all of us. They are investigated in those circumstances by the Chief Medical Examiner, and there is, in addition, an internal investigation in the case of the department. In addition, in any circumstance where the recommendation of the chief medical officer is that there should be a fatality inquiry convened, that is exactly what takes place.

Mrs. Forsyth: Premier, it's your internal committee that's recommending these, not mine.

Last year the former Minister of Human Services said that governments are really good at commissioning reports. This is your new management, Premier. Isn't that true? Good at commissioning, bad at implementing. A new report – now, this is under your management – says that all child deaths should be investigated. The child advocate is the best person to review these deaths and make recommendations that could prevent further tragedy. Minister, almost a thousand kids in care have died over the last 15 years. Twenty-six have died this year alone. These deaths are still not being reported . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the death of a child in care is one too many. Every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally, depending on the situation: internally through notification with the statutory director and externally with the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the fatality inquiry group, and the chief medical officer. I can assure you we will continue to investigate all those deaths.

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, the reporting of the unproven allegations against one of your ministers led to his resignation. I will not be asking about the allegations or alleging anything, but sworn affidavits were provided. Premier, on what date did you first learn of the sworn affidavits in question?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I think we're sharply aware that this is largely an internal party matter, but if you wish, hon. Government House Leader, there's nothing illegal in the question. It's probably not government policy, as far as I know, but I'll look forward to your clarification.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I believe you ruled on Thursday that this questioning really skirts the line. I'm not aware of any investigation by any law enforcement agency here. It appears

to me that this is entirely a party matter, which in the past you have ruled should not be discussed in this Chamber.

The Speaker: That is correct. The clarification stands. Let's see where you go with your supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am simply asking when the Premier – the Premier – received specific information, so it's a very simple question. On what date did you or anyone from the Premier's office or anyone under your employ first learn of the unproven allegations against the minister who resigned?

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, if you wish to clarify this from a government perspective.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, the former associate minister, has stepped aside as he proceeds to clear his name in a matter that is a party matter.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier, these allegations of course are absolutely not proven, and they have been denied. So in order to clear the air, have you referred the information to the Ethics Commissioner?

The Speaker: Does somebody wish to comment? The hon. Premier.

Mr. Prentice: I've spoken to the allegations, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would agree.

Let us move on there to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked questions about the life-saving benefits of mandatory vaccinations for Alberta schoolchildren. The Minister of Education said he takes very seriously the proposal and he'd like to have consultations with people across the province. The next day the Health minister said: we are not going to mandate it. With the ministers contradicting each other, Albertans still don't know where this government stands on this important public health issue. To the Premier: will the Premier break the tie and tell us if this government is in favour or not of mandatory school vaccinations?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we were very clear. We believe deeply in vaccinations. They are very important. Immunization is an important part of the protection we can give our young people. At the same time we believe we should consult with different groups, and our public health people should be the first we should consult with. We will take the next step, to discuss that with them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a bit encouraging. One thing that we can all agree on is that vaccines save lives. What this government can't agree on is the process. The Education minister said that he's going to consult, but he was also ultimately passing to the Health minister the responsibility to work with the

schools. This is certainly blurred communication. Again to the Premier: how can you come up with a credible plan to ensure children are immunized when your ministers can't agree?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, that's far from the truth. The fact of the matter is that we do agree. Immunization is very important. We do believe, though, that discussing with the public is an important step, not just mandating things without any public consultation.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's assume for a minute they do consult with Albertans about mandatory immunizations. We're still unsure which of the ministers is going to take the lead, what the consultation process will look like, and when a decision will be made. Albertans want to know when this government will put the health and safety of our children ahead of politics.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we always put the health of our children ahead of everything, politics and everything else. The minister and I have talked, and we will work together to put together a program for consultation to discuss with our public health people to see what is the best way to do this. We think it's an important step, and we'll move forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As the PCs frantically rush to nominate their slate of candidates, serious allegations have emerged about the conduct of certain candidates, including the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, who has been forced to resign from the cabinet. Far from being an internal party matter, this is an allegation of criminal activity. So far the only investigation into these allegations of criminal activity will be conducted by the PC Party. Will the Premier admit that the allegations of criminal activity should be referred to the police and not investigated by the same political party that is involved . . .

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Party Matters

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I think this matter has been clarified and has been nicely summed up as being contrary to parliamentary tradition here. It states here – I hope we've stopped the clock, Clerk, but I want to deal with this because I can see where this is going. It's been clarified by both the Premier, just now, and by the Minister of Justice that it is in fact an internal party matter, and there is a statement here that I'll refer you to in case this comes up some more so that we can stop the discussion on that, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and it clearly states here what questions should be all about or should not be all about. I'll refresh your memories quickly once right now. Further, "a question should not . . . concern internal party matters, or party or election expenses."

I have let a few questions go already. Last week we heard three questions from your leader. Today we heard three questions from the Opposition House Leader, and now we're hearing another one, but at the time I conclude that this is a party matter as clarified.

I'll pass to the Minister of Justice if he wishes to reclarify, and if not, let's hear what your second supplemental might sound like. The hon. Minister of Justice. No? Okay. Thank you.

Let us move on, then. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Notley: Point of order.

Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie
(continued)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, let me ask this question. If someone inside a political party murdered somebody else in that political party, would it be ruled that it is an internal party matter and no questions are allowed?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you see, you've just illustrated the point why we don't perhaps allow internal party matters to come forward like this, and in this case I did allow some. So don't let's have any griping about this. I did allow some last week. I just allowed some now. I think the matter has been dealt with. You know where it's going. You know what's been undertaken. So I would ask you now to look at your third and final supplemental, please, and be cautious in the wording you use.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's settled.

This is a general question to the Premier. Does he not think that as Premier of the province he has a responsibility to ensure that allegations of a potentially criminal nature are investigated by the appropriate authorities and not brushed aside to be dealt with by a political party, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice, do you wish to clarify, please?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could rise on something new, but this again is an internal party matter, and that's where it should stay, outside of this Chamber.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on now to Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Lougheed.

Long-term Care Beds for Seniors
(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two hundred and eighty-seven thousand: that's the total number of alternate level of care bed days just this year. Every day 822 mostly seniors are not getting the right care in the right place by the right team, the main cause of long wait times, delayed and cancelled surgeries. A study released today by Dr. Donna Wilson at the University of Alberta shows that we actually need up to 20,000 more additional nursing care beds, not the 300 restorative spaces the PCs are promising. Why isn't the Health minister building the beds we need instead of making more promises just before an election?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not seen the study. I have heard the numbers, and they're pretty wild. We will continue to do what we believe is best for the seniors in this province and those who need long-term care. We'll continue to develop the programs and the support systems that are necessary. We've had great leadership from the Minister of Seniors. This year alone, as the Premier noted, well over 2,500 beds we're going to be improving and building. So we'll continue to do what we need to do to meet the needs of Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.
First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Health minister must be aware by now that Alberta Health Services' own figures put the average cost of a hospital bed at \$777 a day compared to a long-term care bed, which is \$170 a day, and, of course, much cheaper for home-care services. This PC government has no claim to fiscal or social responsibility, wasting \$182 million last year by clogging up beds, 10 per cent of many of our hospitals.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I can only say that this government is committed, and we're showing that by building more and more facilities. We care passionately about our seniors. We'll continue to build these facilities. The reality is that those people in need of this support will get it somewhere within our province, and we hope that we'll continue to build the long-term care beds. But if we do need to keep people in acute-care beds to ensure their safety and security and health, we will do that.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's precisely the problem. They're not safe and secure in the wrong place by the wrong team, Mr. Speaker.

Given that ambulances cannot transfer patients through to emergency because it's full and the ER is full because upstairs is full and the beds upstairs are full because this government has not built the long-term care beds needed, does the Health minister still not realize the severe lack of nursing home beds is harming every aspect of our health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we've committed to building a substantive number of beds, delivering beds today, building beds for tomorrow, and we'll continue to do that. We understand the challenges. That's why we put a program in place to add \$50 million to improve our emergency departments. We understand some of the challenges. They're being dealt with, we think, efficiently, effectively, and we will continue to be committed to improving the care of Albertans in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. leader of the ND opposition, did you have a point of order around 2:04, when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was speaking? Did you have a point of order or somebody there?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

The Speaker: Yes, there is a point of order? Well, you'll let me know. Let me know if there is or if there isn't.

Let's move on to Calgary-Lougheed, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Seniors' Housing for Couples

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I often hear from my constituents in Calgary-Lougheed about the urgent need for more seniors' housing and care facilities. They're concerned that the human side of this issue may sometimes be overlooked in favour of numbers and statistics. I've heard stories of husbands and wives who've been together for decades but due to overcrowding or differing needs are placed into separate facilities in their golden years. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. How do you respond to the criticism that we need to make better use of our existing infrastructure to ensure situations like these do not occur on a go-forward basis?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for his question. He's absolutely right. We need to make better use of all of our resources, and we are. The Premier's vision to put all of the housing elements into one ministry has created a much more efficient and effective way to deliver projects. This one-window approach has improved collaboration between departments, proponents, and community operators, which has led to lower cost projects that produce more spaces and innovative solutions to meet the needs of Alberta's seniors, including keeping couples together.

2:10

Mr. Rodney: My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Can he assure my constituents that seniors' housing is constructed and operated in a manner that puts families first so that divorce by nursing home becomes a thing of the past?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good point. Many of the spaces coming on stream are actually designed to keep couples together even if their individual care needs escalate or are different. Just last week I was at the Bethany care centre in Calgary to announce the new beds. Within a campus of care, a variety of care options on the same footprint within the same facility, we're seeing supportive and assisted living, independent living, dementia units, and long-term care or nursing home beds. This campus of care is exactly what the Premier has mandated us to do to ensure Alberta's parents and grandparents can age in place with their spouses and their loved ones in the communities that they helped build.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. Can he assure our most experienced Albertans that their needs will be high on the list of provincial priorities and that all of these recently announced seniors' facilities are actually going to get built despite current economic realities and challenges?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we're keeping our commitments. The money is in the budget. We announced last fall that we were building new spaces, and we moved quickly with facilities to get the work done. We'll see more than 2,600 new spaces come on stream, a thousand more than we anticipated with the same dollars. This success is because of the collaboration and the redesign under the new management that we spoke of earlier. We're moving today to get these spaces built, and I think that the member would agree that the assisted living and continuing care spaces for our seniors qualify as a critical need.

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

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently an internal letter from the Minister of Service Alberta to the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, better known as AMVIC, became public. Among other things the letter talked about misuse of enforcement tools and an inappropriate enforcement hearing that could be construed as illegal. A report into this situation is finished, but so far only the minister knows what took place. To the minister: what is going on within this government agency?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question, and I want to thank him for bringing some awareness to Service Alberta and the important work we do in protecting consumers. I'd like to address the question by saying that my

position is that we support AMVIC. AMVIC is doing good work. We're currently undertaking a review, and the review is to help AMVIC do their jobs better.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's not so.

Again to the minister: given that AMVIC should fill an important role for Albertans by promoting trust and integrity in the province's motor vehicle industry and since you won't show Albertans what they deserve by releasing the report, will you do the right thing today and tell this House whether any government officials have broken the law or acted inappropriately?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, again I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question. Specifically to the report, we're currently working with the board chair and the board on the report. The report is a draft report. Once we have an indication of the board and where they're going with the report – we had a meeting with the board. It was a very collaborative meeting. We're quite happy with the results of our meeting. When we've given the board the appropriate time to get back to us, we'll look at making that report public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Final supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It's not a draft report, Minister.

Any actions that would violate the trust of Albertans and the morale of front-line workers should be brought to the light of day. Will you do the right thing, Minister, and reassure Albertans and immediately release the full report or a timeline for that?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I do want to correct the hon. member. The report is indeed a draft report. We're currently working with the board and the board chair. We're supporting them in their efforts to help and assist the operational side of AMVIC, and once we've gotten some feedback from the board, we'll take a look at making that report public.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Elk Population

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been receiving many calls on the extremely high elk population in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. The increased number of elk has caused a tremendous burden to the farmers on the land and fences that it has destroyed, and the crops that were once viable feeding sources are no longer. My question is to the Minister of ESRD. When is your department going to properly manage the harvesting of elk?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, we definitely recognize that this is a significant issue, and we're working towards balancing the needs of all users on the land, which includes sustaining healthy elk populations while limiting the impacts that they have on the livelihoods of ranchers and farmers. We are working through our draw system to encourage high levels of hunting for this particular species, and we'll continue to conduct aerial surveys to inform harvest goals and the effectiveness of our program and make adjustments as they're needed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you. To the same minister: given that not only are the elk destroying the hay and the feeding sources, but

they're now contaminating feeding areas, does your department have a compensation plan for the feeding areas and feeding tents?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Financial compensation is provided to producers through the wildlife damage compensation program delivered through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. ESRD does consult with producers that are seeking financial compensation, as does fish and wildlife enforcement, and we'll continue to provide information, advice, and fencing materials to agricultural producers who need the help to protect their farm assets.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. McDonald: Well, thank you very much. Finally, to the same minister: is your department considering property-owner harvesting in timely areas of the harvesting season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Landowners are eligible for special hunting tags to help reduce the elk populations that are affecting their property. They can apply for a landowners' special licence that enables them, if they were unsuccessful through the draw process, to harvest antlerless elk on their land. Applicants must own a minimum of a quarter section in a single parcel of a 160 acres, more or less, or be involved in the direct farming operations on that land.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

School Fees

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta every family – single parent, two parents, rich, or poor – pays a school fee for every child. Now, contrary to what the government would like Albertans to think, these school fees aren't for luxuries. They are for things like supervision of students at lunchtime and participation in fitness activities. When the government is boasting about low personal taxes, I bet they aren't mentioning this regressive tax on parents. To the Minister of Education: is the minister planning on dumping this regressive school tax, a tax specifically on parents of students?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, we take very seriously the role that local school boards play in providing quality education services to our students. It is up to local school boards to decide what fees they may or may not decide to apply to support their particular education programs. These are of course not to fund basic education services.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. Well, given that the average school fee across Canada is \$50 to \$75 per student but Albertans pay an average of \$286 per student, how does the minister justify his government's policy that allows local boards to not only tax parents but tax them at four to five times the rate of other Canadian provinces?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I believe we lead the country or are almost at the top in the country in terms of the amount of money that this government provides to local school authorities to provide quality

education to children. Now, we leave it up to the local boards to decide if they want to augment that funding for nonbasic educational activities for children, and that is important, that we provide that kind of local autonomy for boards. We respect them, and we're not going to engage in directing them in that regard.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you've got to kind of square that circle there, Minister, because you're saying that you're providing them with money but clearly not enough money because they are having to tax parents. Let's say parents of two kids: that would be \$572 cash on the barrelhead every September. Or three kids: \$858 cash up front every September. Clearly, the ministry is not providing school boards, schools, or parents enough money.

Mr. Dirks: Well, for the benefit of all members of the House the Education budget this year is about \$7.6 billion. I said billion, Mr. Speaker. That's an increase of \$413 million over the previous year, \$38 million every day being spent to educate the children in Alberta. As I said earlier, we are at the high end in this country on how much we spend per student. We have a great education system that we can be proud of.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20

Energy Policies

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the energy sector is hurting right now. Commodity prices remain low, market access remains a challenge, and the export of LNG from the west coast remains uncertain. We can act decisively and collaboratively with the governments of B.C. and Saskatchewan to enhance competitive advantage for all western Canadian energy stakeholders. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is our government doing to advance these regional collaborations and their practical impacts on Alberta's competitiveness?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed true that it is critical, maybe even more so, in these times of low prices that we're able to access world markets and get world prices for our products. I can tell you that the department, indeed the entire government, is working very aggressively. That's right from the Premier, who's done work to renew the New West Partnership with British Columbia and Saskatchewan and has done work with Ontario and Quebec and the federal government, and through the work of our trade representatives, Jay Hill in the west and Rob Merrifield working in Washington and Ottawa. We have been very aggressive on this file.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: To the same minister: where is our government in the design and the implementation of a strategy to further stimulate the added value here in Alberta for natural gas liquids?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, value-added diversification is another item in my mandate letter. I think that the hon. member would be aware of the incremental ethane extraction program, which allowed for 91,000 barrels of incremental ethane to go as feedstock into the petrochemical industry right here in Alberta.

Wherever there are opportunities, we'll chase those. I'm looking at an opportunity in the propane value-added chain right at the moment.

Ms Kennedy-Glans: That makes me happy.

To the same minister: with the recent approval of the site C hydroelectricity dam in B.C., has there been any regional dialogue about upgrading Alberta's interties with B.C. to enhance our ability to import hydroelectricity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member would be aware that the Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO – it's their job to ensure that Alberta has a robust, resilient, and effective electricity system. We do have a productive relationship with B.C., and we will ensure that steps are taken to expand interties where necessary. I can tell you that AESO is planning to work right now with B.C. Hydro on a discussion to identify mutual opportunities, including the possibility of new transmission. I'll also assure this House that we'll do so on a level playing field to ensure that our investor-driven market is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Surgery Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the NDP released documents yet again showing a crisis in Alberta's hospitals. The overall number of cancelled surgeries in Alberta due to a shortage of hospital beds is up 30 per cent compared to the same time last year. That means more hips that don't get replaced, longer periods of time that Albertans suffer painful conditions, and more children on a roller coaster of anxiety over hospital visits. To the Minister of Health: will you admit that Albertans are being forced to pay a very painful price for your government's chronic neglect of our health care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any time in our province an individual's surgery is delayed or adjusted, we are very concerned because it does have a tremendous impact on their lives. But the statistics show that less than 1 per cent of our total of 158,000 people have had surgery cancelled this year. So we would like to have zero and will work towards that, but at this point in time .87 per cent is not different than other years.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that at the Stollery hospital the number of surgeries for children that are cancelled is on track to more than double this year and given that these delays are not due to the long-term care crisis that your government is responsible for but, rather, simply due to a shortage of acute-care beds for kids, to the Minister of Health: will you explain to those Alberta families why at the Stollery in 2014 142 more kids than the year before had to struggle with the pain and suffering that comes from having a surgery cancelled?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, our hearts and thoughts go out to those individuals, those families that went through that situation. It's not something we are comfortable with. We'll continue to work hard. But we had a 17 per cent increase in emergency surgeries last year, which helps drive up the numbers. We have a lot of people coming from outside the province. This main centre, the Stollery, is a

wonderful facility. We're investing money in it, so we'll hope to reduce that next year, but a lot of times it depends on the year, the circumstances, and what drives the results.

Ms Notley: Well, it sounds like mismanagement to me.

Given that when parents take their child to the hospital for surgery, it's extremely stressful because they have to prepare their child for all the new, anxiety-provoking situations that entails and that to go back repeatedly for a surgery that gets postponed multiplies the stress and anxiety experienced by parents and their children and given that under your government's neglectful eye the number of cancelled children's surgeries at the Stollery has grown 100 per cent in the last year, why should Albertans trust you to protect any part of our health care system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we feel the same way as the hon. member, that for any person that has to come to the hospital and that has surgery cancelled, it's a very traumatic experience. For a child it's even worse. We will as circumstances allow continue to expand operations at the various facilities. But the reality is that we've had a lot of pressure this year, with a 70 per cent increase in emergency surgeries, which does create some problems within the system. We'll continue to work with the families. We apologize for what has been done, but we will continue to work hard.

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

Open Data Portal Information Disclosure Policy

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerns have been raised about government plans to dump the freedom of information requests to the government open data portal once a week. Along with the concern of hiding information, the public has raised concerns about their private information being shared online. My question to the Minister of Service Alberta: what is being done to assure that the information of Albertans is not dumped online for all to see?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government stands by the fact that public information belongs to the public. Service Alberta is currently working on a public disclosure policy, and my ministry will be working in consultation with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to make sure that the rights of all Albertans are protected. Our draft policy is centred on sharing responses to general FOIP questions so that private information of Albertans is protected by the protocols of FOIP.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is this government seemingly rushing to start off the process of simultaneous disclosure for FOIP responses? Is there something this government is trying to hide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is: absolutely not. A strong public disclosure policy will offer transparency to all Albertans, and that's the absolute opposite of hiding. A FOIP is considered public information, and we are providing that information to the public. When our policy is finalized, we'll ensure that there is sufficient time for applicants

such as media to receive their responses before the responses go public.

Mr. Quadri: To the same minister: the FOIP Act review has been discussed for nearly two years now. When will we see some actual results?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. It's a good question. The FOIP Act, as we all know, was implemented in 2002, and since that time technology and public data have changed considerably. Substantial work is already completed on analyzing the impact of proposed changes in the review. We'll continue our work with Justice and Solicitor General as well as consultation with the office of the Privacy Commissioner. Service Alberta will continue to work hard on the review, and we trust that in the upcoming months we'll have a lot of good work to show Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Deaths of Children in Care (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the Ministry of Human Services decides whether or not to investigate the deaths of children in care without proper guidelines or oversight. Isn't it time that we stopped playing bureaucratic games with both reporting and investigating the deaths of children in care? To the Minister of Human Services: why have you failed to properly investigate the deaths of all children in care and to protect vulnerable children from suffering the same fate in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the death of a child in care is one too many. I can assure you that every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally depending on the situation, internally with respect to the statutory director and, of course, externally with the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the chief medical officer, and the Fatality Review Board, if necessary.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that with all of these layers of potential investigation I wonder how come the job is still not being done properly and given that delays in reporting children's deaths in government care only serve to make a bad situation even worse, to the minister again: how can you claim to be properly investigating the deaths of children in care when it isn't even clear that deaths were properly reported months after they happened?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, every critical incident or death is examined internally and externally. I have to say that the implementation oversight committee, headed by Tim Richter, has done a lot of great work – a lot of great work – that we have started and will continue. We are the leader. Alberta is a leader in public transparency and disclosure, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Eggen: Really, Mr. Speaker, given that you, Madam Minister, preside over such a confused and murky internal system of dealing

with the deaths of children in care and given that you have an independent officer of the Legislature, the Child and Youth Advocate, staring us all in the face, who could do the job properly, to the Minister of Human Services again: why don't you reverse the cuts that you made to the Child and Youth Advocate, empower them to investigate the deaths of children in care, and put this matter to rest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Working with the Child and Youth Advocate on a regular basis is very important to me. The work he does is absolutely critical, as I have mentioned previously. If there's a need to enhance and refresh what we're doing already with respect to oversight and quality assurance, we will continue to do that. I will continue to support the Child and Youth Advocate, with the good work that he does, through my ministry.

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

Wildlife-human Coexistence in Southwestern Alberta

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner contains some of the richest farming and ranching areas in our province. The beautiful Waterton biosphere reserve is on the west end of my riding, and it is home to farming, ranching, and many species of wildlife, including large carnivores. To the Minister of ESRD: what programs are in place to protect both the wildlife as well as the people who make their living raising grain and livestock in this area?

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Alberta has the wildlife predator compensation program in place, that provides financial compensation to livestock producers who suffer wildlife-caused predation and injury to livestock as well as shot-dead livestock. Alberta also operates the problem wildlife program, which provides intercept feeding, fencing, bale wrapping, and hazing for wildlife that causes depredation problems on agricultural land, infrastructure, and feed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that wildlife is a natural resource and an asset to all Albertans and visitors, it seems unfair that the farmers and ranchers in this part of my riding should have to bear – pun intended – as much of the cost of predator kills as they currently do. What is the minister going to do to provide adequate, reliable, timely, and predictable compensation to these hard-working people and their families?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I would agree. This program should be easy and straightforward for ranchers and farmers. We do work with the predator compensation committee to identify ways to proactively manage predator-related livestock mortality. We're developing program efficiencies between agencies to ensure that the livestock owners are fairly compensated using current market averages. Once these processes and working relationships are streamlined, you will see more efficient investigations, and payment processing will occur faster.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the predator-kill compensation system works well some of the time but too often leaves producers holding the bag, the Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association has provided you with useful and fair recommendations. Will the minister please tell us when all of these recommendations will be implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. In fact, these recommendations were discussed at the last predator compensation committee meeting, that happened this past February. Some of these recommendations will be implemented once a draft policy and program are defined later on in this year, so we are trying to make progress on these recommendations.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Municipal Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government promised municipalities that they would receive a pot of money worth over \$11 billion over 10 years. Now, just a few years later Premier Stelmach changed it to a promise of \$1.4 billion every year to ensure stable, consistent funding for municipalities, and then Premier Redford one-upped him and promised to make it \$1.6 billion every year. Well, it's all a fantasy 'cause we've never come anywhere close to those figures. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does the government continue to shortchange their promise to municipalities?

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question, especially as we have our friends here today from AUMA and AAMD and C in the gallery. It's nice to have them here with us.

Mr. Speaker, this government takes the MSI funding very seriously: for municipalities, an \$11.3 billion commitment. We have delivered over \$6 billion with that. We continue to work with our municipalities on important infrastructure for them, on the MSI.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'm really interested that the minister quoted the \$1.3 billion figure, yet all the press releases that came out recently were talking about \$1.6 billion. So she's no longer including the basic municipal grant as part of that money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member asked the question. What I quoted was the \$11.3 billion, the whole MSI funding, and of that \$11.3 billion \$6 billion has been delivered in both infrastructure and operating dollars.

Ms Blakeman: All right. As part of the last election campaign the then Premier, a lot of them, promised that the MSI grant would be extended and would be around until 2023. Is the government standing behind that promise?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, today's government, under new management has made the commitment as well to make sure that the \$11.3 billion for MSI funding is there for the municipalities. These are our partners; we value their partnership. The Premier has signed an MOU with AUMA, AAMD and C, and the two large-city mayors with charters. This is a government and a Premier that are honouring these commitments and are working with our valued municipal partners.

School Construction

Mr. McAllister: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, oil prices have dropped dramatically over the past six months. As a province we're looking at somewhere near a \$7 billion shortfall in the budget. Clearly, spending will be reduced. It should be reduced. However, there were some promises made that we absolutely must honour. No matter where we sit in here, we know there is a great need for new schools in this province. To the Minister of Infrastructure, the man on the hot seat for this: will you commit to Albertans that these schools are a priority and will be built as promised?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Yes, in short, the schools will be built. We have a number of organizations that are coming out and saying that capital spending in private industry is going to go down as a result of oil prices, but what the public can know is that this is a great opportunity for us to invest in our public infrastructure, to build the schools we need, and, potentially at this point in time, save some dollars while we're doing it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

First supplemental.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Committing to building these schools is absolutely a priority. However, many people are skeptical that the timeline is going to be pushed back, that the construction period will be delayed because of the shortfall in funding. To the same minister: can you assure Albertans that this is not the case? Will you build these schools on the timeline that you promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said in this House before, phase 1 schools were announced in 2011, opened in 2014, three years later. Last week we had 39 schools on which tenders had closed and contracts have been awarded. This week, as of right now we have 45 schools from phase 2 where contracts have been awarded.

2:40

Mr. McAllister: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Education. Minister, I'll be the last person to criticize the government for cutting spending and being fiscally responsible. I think we all know that that is a priority given the provincial financial reality. However, we do not want this to affect our kids in the classroom, and that is the bottom line regardless of where we sit. Can the Minister of Education assure us that whatever is done in the Education portfolio will not trickle down and affect our kids in the class?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier to members in the Assembly today, I believe that our annual budget this year for Education is about \$7.6 billion. So we are committed; this is

indicative of our commitment to investment in education so our children have every opportunity. We take seriously our responsibility to support students and do so in a fiscally prudent manner. Alberta's education system is, in fact, one of the best in the world, and we all ought to be proud of our education system. Once our new budget is released, members will see that we continue to work with our stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Stony Plain.

In Vitro Fertilization

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Becoming a parent is one of the greatest joys in life, but out of necessity some of our families have to turn to in vitro fertilization to conceive. Unfortunately, oversight of fertility clinics in Alberta is lacking. Oversight is lacking, and there's no standardized fee structure. In fact, some clinics may be denying treatment because of skin colour, according to recent reports, while some families just don't have the financial means. To the minister: will you commit to ensuring that families who require in vitro fertilization will have reasonable access to treatment?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, those kinds of issues we'll leave between their doctor and the individual. We do offer programs and support for people. We encourage them to speak with their doctor about how they can access the things that we allow in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: I'm talking about supplemental public funding, Mr. Minister.

Given that the public health funds for these services actually reduce costs to the health system because they reduce the number of premature infants and multiple births, is the minister considering providing public funding for IVF? If not, why not?

Mr. Mandel: In this period of time, Mr. Speaker, we have tremendous demands on our system, and we'll continue to deliver the services that we have committed to, but looking at expanding those services at this point in time is very difficult given the current restraints.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the media reports that some physicians may be refusing treatment based on skin colour, will the government tell us that they are investigating the matter and tell us how it plans to ensure that there's no discrimination in these services?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I will keep that under advisement. If that is the case, this is not something this government or any government should tolerate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. The time for Oral Question Period has expired. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the second members' statement, and we'll hear from Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us begin, then, with Cypress-Medicine Hat – you have two minutes – followed by Little Bow.

Government Accountability

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like most Albertans, I was shocked when this Premier told me and everyone else to go look in a mirror over our fiscal challenges. After all, Albertans didn't plunge Alberta back into debt or waste taxpayers' hard-earned money. Albertans didn't run up massive deficits or loot our savings accounts for future generations. Albertans didn't run the most expensive government in Canada. Albertans didn't usher in an era of unprecedented waste and entitlement. The members opposite did.

Albertans worked hard to do their best for our province. I don't know what kind of Albertans the Premier knows, but the Albertans I know have worked their fingers to the bone holding our province together when this PC government's waste and entitlement was threatening to tear it apart. Here in the Official Opposition we thank Albertans for their hard work, Mr. Speaker. We thank them for their honesty, their determination, and their will to succeed despite this PC government. We don't blame them for political inconvenience.

I won't rush to judgment, though; maybe the Premier's mirror is broken. But his comments beg the questions: what does he see when he looks in the mirror? Does he see the members of his caucus who are caught misusing taxpayer resources? Does he see the masterminds behind sky palace, Tobaccogate, the Olympic trip, or government planes? Does he see the members currently facing serious accusations of bullying and bribing grassroots supporters? He must not since he gave these very same members glowing endorsements. Or maybe he knows he's wrong, but he's just looking to place the blame somewhere it doesn't belong.

Either way, this Premier is showing he doesn't have the right stuff to lead. After all, real leaders don't blame their mistakes on others; they take the blame.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm honoured to rise in recognition of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Each year the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association along with the government and other partners dedicate a week in March to enhance awareness of safe farm practices. This year's theme is Be the Difference. It encourages individuals, organizations, and communities to make a difference in ensuring Canadian farms are a safe place to work and live.

The government of Alberta is currently piloting the Alberta farm safe plan, a tool to help farmers implement health and safety systems on their farms. The plan is expected to be available to all farmers later this year.

Education is critical to support farm safety and prevent incidents. Last May we launched an online farm safety directory that includes a comprehensive list of contacts to provide farm safety awareness, education, and training. Through the Growing Forward 2 program we also have funding initiatives to enhance farm safety education awareness, including programs directed to rural children and young farm workers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development continues to provide funding for the Farm Safety Centre to encourage the safety smarts farm programs to deliver to all rural school-aged children. The ministry is also working with the Farm Safety Centre on pilot projects for the Alberta sustainable farm family program, which provides farm workers and their families additional tools to effectively manage their well-being and their safety.

Mr. Speaker, Agricultural Safety Week is an excellent opportunity to provide awareness, to provide some of the important safety programs that are going on here in Alberta. I encourage all producers and their families to keep safety in their minds every day and have a solid safety farm plan to ensure their family is safe where they work and live and to make sure all their employees are treated the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe and District

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the importance of youth in Alberta. They are our next leaders. They will be our teachers, our front-line caregivers, our innovators, and our lawmakers. Our youth excel in a range of areas, whether it be academic excellence, attending one of Alberta's fine educational institutions, or through a sport, trade, activity, or charity.

There is one organization, however, that I would like to highlight and talk about the amazing work that they are doing in my constituency, the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka, because without this organization many of our youth would not have been able to hone their skills or gain the confidence that they now exude. It is the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe and District. This wonderful group has been serving youth in central Alberta now for 26 years.

Proudly funded by the community initiatives program grant and generous support from the community, there are currently 83 youth enrolled in this positive mentoring program that Big Brothers Big Sisters offers. Some of the programs that they have include community and in-school mentoring, Kids 'n' Kops police mentoring, as well as subsidies for kids going to camp.

This has meant Big Brothers Big Sisters has been widely recognized, winning multiple local, provincial, and national awards. Among these are the Alberta Solicitor General crime prevention award in 2010, the Chamber of Commerce charity of the year award, and the national Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada team spirit award. This amazing team of 90 volunteers helps kids in the Lacombe area and the wider region reach their fullest potential.

Every child that needs a mentor will have a mentor, Mr. Speaker. Big Brothers Big Sisters will continue to mould the minds of our youth, creating the leaders of tomorrow. This organization really is the little engine that could.

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

2:50 Waterton Biodiversity Reserve

Mr. Bikman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Located in the south-western corner of Alberta in my riding of Cardston-Taber-Warner is the Waterton biosphere reserve, WBR, one of only 16 biosphere reserves in Canada. It encompasses some of the most spectacular, ecologically diverse landscapes in the Canadian Rockies and prairie grasslands. Designated in 1979 by UNESCO, the WBR fosters and encourages a sustainable, community-based regional economy with quality biodiversity, landscape, and social values.

Biosphere reserves are recognized internationally for demonstrating practical approaches to balancing biodiversity conservation and sustainable human use of the land. The Waterton biosphere reserve includes a protected 505 square kilometre core area in Waterton Lakes national park but extends well beyond the national park to include the buffer zone of surrounding private

ranch, farm, and residential land and a broad transition zone that supports many people in a wide range of economic activities.

Currently the transition zone includes the MD of Pincher Creek, Cardston county, and Crowsnest Pass, including the Piikani and Kainai reserves and a portion of the Rocky Mountain forest reserve. Here the goal of sustainable resource use is explored and encouraged through research, education, and community-based planning. Land use in the buffer and transition zones is not regulated or restricted in any way by having the biosphere status.

Over the last 30 years volunteers working on behalf of the WBR have supported our communities in many practical ways by providing funding and support for projects, forums, and research that address local land management concerns.

The Waterton biosphere reserve is a living demonstration of the value we place on our natural and cultural resources, our traditional livelihoods, and our commitment to work together as good stewards of the land we hope to pass on to future generations.

Thank you.

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

Multicultural Seniors' Housing

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about something that is truly important to my constituents of Edmonton-Manning, our seniors. Our seniors worked hard to make Alberta a great place, the great province that it is today, and we must ensure that they are able to continue living independent and fulfilling lives.

Alberta is a multicultural place that's blessed with a multitude of people from many cultures who bring with them a diverse range of traditions. Several family members in Edmonton-Manning have suggested a great idea. Since many of their elderly parents cannot speak English, they would like to see more workers hired who can speak their mother tongue. Their vision for their parents' care would be one that is culturally familiar to them, where they can find a menu that caters to the tastes of their homelands.

Mr. Speaker, I know that our government is one that is inclusive and respectful to the needs of all its citizens, and I hope that this multicultural initiative is one that can be considered in greater detail as a possible alternative for our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 19

Education Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to introduce a bill, and the bill is Bill 19.

If I could just make some brief comments. Bill 19, Education Amendment Act, 2015, is the title of this legislation that, through a series of amendments, will assist in ensuring that the Education Act is, upon its proclamation, successful in focusing education on the student and supporting educational choice, enabling school boards to be more collaborative and responsive to their students. During the process of finalizing the Education Act regulations, a process that's nearing completion, a series of amendments were identified by legislative drafters' legal services as required for the act. Bill 19 does not change the intention of the Education Act; the amendments are largely administrative in nature, with the purpose of providing increased clarity and accuracy, ensuring alignment with other legislation. This bill is a result of due diligence in ensuring that the

Education Act will be effective in serving the long-term needs of Alberta's students.

With that, I ask for leave to move first reading of this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Bill 20 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

The Municipal Government Act, or the MGA, creates the framework in which municipalities operate. It impacts every Albertan, the private sector, and every ministry in government in one form or another. Mr. Speaker, the world we live in has changed since the MGA was first proclaimed in 1995. The act is in need of updating to reflect changes in technology, new economic realities, and evolving municipal roles and responsibilities. The proposed amendments are the result of extensive public consultation and collaboration with municipal partners and stakeholders. This is the first set of amendments coming from the MGA review process. These changes have broad support from the municipal associations, the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and key business and industry associations.

I look forward to speaking more about this legislation. I'm proud to table Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, and I move that the bill be read for the first time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Childhood . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interject here. The Minister of Human Services has caught my attention, and I believe there is a supplemental motion here.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move pursuant to Standing Order 75 that Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

The Speaker: Thank you. Apologies for not catching your eye sooner.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: I believe that now we can move on.

Bill 206 Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act, or CCEE Act.

Bill 206 would ensure that children of school age are set up for success by requiring a comprehensive eye exam by grade 1. The

CCEE Act could help reduce potential learning and behavioural difficulties that affect children with visual impairments. As we know, more than 25 per cent of school-aged children have vision problems that can limit their potential in all aspects of learning and life. Thanks to the work of initiatives like the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, more children are getting their eyes examined. Still many children in Alberta begin school without a comprehensive eye exam.

Mr. Speaker, you need to read to succeed, and Bill 206 is an important step to ensuring that children in our families and communities across Alberta have the tools to succeed in the classroom and in life. After all, children are Alberta's most important priority.

I move that the bill be read a first time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I've had a flurry of notes here, but I have to recognize the Government House Leader given the time on the clock.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask unanimous consent of the Chamber that we can continue the Routine past 3 p.m. notwithstanding rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to proceed, so let's go to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

3:00

Bill 207 Independent Budget Officer Act

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise here today to introduce Bill 207, the Independent Budget Officer Act.

After 22 years in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, this will be my last private member's bill that I will introduce. I don't know if that's good or bad. If passed, this legislation would establish an independent budget officer reporting to the Legislature. Its mandate is to provide independent analysis to the Leg. Assembly about the state of Alberta finances, including the budget and quarterly updates and the trend in the provincial and national economies. When requested by a committee of the Leg., the independent budget officer would undertake research for the committee into Alberta's finances and economy. He would also be empowered to investigate cost estimates of government proposals at the request of members of this Legislature. At a time when confusion has never been greater over the state of Alberta finances, the independent budget officer would bring clarity and credibility to the numbers.

I sincerely hope to receive the support of all members of this House on this important piece of legislation, and I am honoured to move first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

The Speaker: Just before we proceed with the next item of business, could I have your unanimous consent to revert briefly for one introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Whitecourt-St. Anne, would you proceed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you visitors here today to listen to the debate on Bill 203: from the Alberta Forest Products Association CEO and President Paul Whittaker; Brock Mulligan, director of communications from the Alberta Forest Products Association; Rory Koska, technical adviser with Wood Works!; Jim Rivait, the chief executive officer with the Canadian Home Builders' Association of Alberta; and T.J. Keil, the external relations manager with CHBA. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We'll begin with Edmonton-Centre, followed by Calgary-McCall. We have several today.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets for the leader of the third party, the Liberal caucus, and one set for myself. The first is with regard to question 4, that the leader asked regarding immunization.

The second tabling is called What Is the Right Number of Nursing Home Beds for Alberta? – 20,000 More, authored by Donna Wilson, a professor at the University of Alberta; Ryan Brow; Robyn Playfair; and Harpreet Gill.

The third tabling is actually three different articles, all on the 18th question, that was asked by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. They are all articles on in vitro fertilization clinics from the *Globe and Mail*, CBC news, and more CBC news.

The tabling that I have, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent, Susan Cake, who is writing with her concerns particularly about the promises that were made by the Premier when he was running for election as the leader of the party opposite. She's deeply concerned that the Premier "is backpedaling on his promise to restore funding" and undercutting her belief in politicians. She feels very strongly that "increases in tuition are not the fix for this situation" and that neither are market modifiers.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was an auspicious occasion when the Minister of Infrastructure made the announcement on the status of promised new schools. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an award of excellence on behalf of Albertans to the PC government for schools not built. Since the Minister of Infrastructure is not here to accept his award, I will send his award to the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: I understand that the tabling from Calgary-Mountain View has been dealt with, so let us move on to Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you wish to cover both?

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll indulge me, I'll make my tabling, followed by the tabling on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter between myself and Reid Hamula, a constituent of Edmonton-

Beverly-Clareview who wrote to me about his struggles living as an AISH recipient who has had his CPP disability deducted from his monthly benefits. I am tabling this document in hope that it'll raise awareness of the unfair PC policies in the AISH and WCB programs.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a sworn declaration addressed to the Premier that alleges that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie attempted to bribe a member of his constituency association to withdraw his name as a candidate for the nomination in the member's constituency. While it is acknowledged that these claims haven't been proven in court . . .

Mr. Denis: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: . . . we call on the government to appoint a special prosecutor or refer this matter to the police.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I heard a point of order during a tabling, which is a bit rare, but let me hear what you're . . .

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I believe you ruled earlier on this. I rise in accordance with 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) but also the citation you talked about dealing with party matters. I believe this tabling to be out of order, and I would ask you to rule accordingly.

The Speaker: Okay. I was just looking it up, in fact, and that's what distracted me momentarily. We'll deal with this at the appropriate time. Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe we have two points of order, one that was raised during Oral Question Period at approximately 2:04. I'm not sure that they wish to proceed, because I haven't heard otherwise, but could I recognize the hon. leader of the ND opposition? I'm assuming you wish to proceed with the point of order, so proceed and raise your citation, and we'll move from there.

Point of Clarification

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, on behalf of the ND opposition House leader I rise pursuant to section 13(2) to ask the following question. This is with respect, of course, to the Speaker's ruling around internal party matters, what is and is not.

Given that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was attempting to ask the Solicitor General about the appointment of a special prosecutor, a matter which is solely and squarely within the scope of his ministerial responsibility, and given that the precedent of the Saskatchewan Conservative Party a decade ago demonstrates that party activity can also amount to criminal behaviour by cabinet ministers in certain cases and given that the issue is not what a question touches on but actually, rather, that the issue is about the primary focus of the question and given that the focus in this case is the degree to which the people of Alberta can be assured that any criminal investigation which may arise out of the allegations made against a former member of cabinet will be conducted under the advice of a clearly independent special prosecutor, can the Speaker please explain why he shut down a line of questioning which dealt with prosecutorial independence simply because the alleged criminal behaviour occurred in relation to activity within the PC Party?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this member I have a great deal of respect for. She's legally trained, and she's got many more years at the bar than I do. That being said, I'm really shocked at her argument here.

There are two clear delineations here. First off, dealing with criminal activity, when I had the difficult task of reporting someone who used to serve in this Chamber to the RCMP, of course, we then appointed a special prosecutor from Ontario for exactly the reason that she enunciates. It's a perceptual issue, but it's also an operational issue. But, again, that only deals, Mr. Speaker, with criminal activity. This is a party matter. There has been no charge laid. There is no investigation, to the best of my knowledge, so the bottom line is: yes, we would appoint a special prosecutor if this were a criminal matter. As this member well knows, this is a party matter. There have been no charges laid, and there is no investigation, to the best of my knowledge, at this point.

Mr. Speaker, you ruled on this on Thursday, but this member continues to persist. I would suggest that this point is out of order.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. Briefly, please.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader cannot have it both ways here. There are allegations of a criminal offence. There are allegations. That's important to note, that the evidence is strictly an allegation. This opposition has an unfettered right to ask the government about any type of allegation, particularly when there is no investigation, there is no criminal complaint, but it does affect the operation of the actual government.

Now, you have a privilege, once it's under investigation, to say that it is now within the judicial system – I understand that – but it's not there. So to ask the government whether or not they're going to investigate or whether or not this is going to be put to the proper authority is the right of the opposition. There is no privilege defence against a criminal act. The location of the criminal activity, any alleged criminal activity, is irrelevant, whether it's internal to the party or whether it's out on the street. It's the allegation that affects the government that the opposition has a right to question and ask the government what it intends to do.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, and I believe that will conclude our speakers list on this point.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I rise today on a very serious matter. Everyone in this House knows that these allegations have not been proven, and the member has denied them, but these are allegations of a criminal offence. I would submit that this principle should govern in a scenario like this. It does not matter if a political party is involved. A potential criminal activity should trump any political party aspect in this regard. In other words, if there's some type of criminality involved, even if it involves a political party, that should be subject to debate here in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, by shutting down this line of questioning, it is outside of any possible precedent that our staff could find across Canada. You would be ruling in a way that no other jurisdiction – every other jurisdiction would allow this question to be asked. It's only your ruling here today that is inconsistent with that precedent.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, as well, when members here receive information that's very serious, whether it's coming from outside of a political party or from the public, the same principle applies. If it's a very serious matter, we can deal with it here in this Legislature. What your ruling does is that it essentially shields the

government from any questioning, where a government official puts on a party hat and says: no, you can't question me here in this Legislature. This is unprecedented. It would be the only jurisdiction in Canada where we couldn't ask this question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I heard that there was a point of order. I'm not sure exactly if the point of order that was being requested at the time or has since been attempted for clarification is with respect to more of a clarification of the ruling that I made earlier. I'm going to accept it that way because, as you know, you can't really raise a point of order against the Speaker, so you were careful in how you phrased that. Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills went a little bit further, but I'll deal with that in a moment.

Nonetheless, this request for clarification is more just that than it is a point of order, so I'll make a couple of comments in that respect. One is that when today's issue arose, it was brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It was very clear in what he said, and I have the Blues in front of me, which, assuming their accuracy amongst other things, attribute the following words to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: "So far the only investigation into these allegations of criminal activity will be conducted by the PC Party."

At that point he immediately had my attention because, as you well know because it's been said so many times in this House, you should not be raising questions that have anything to do with internal party matters. That's the point that I raised, and I cautioned members about that last Thursday. I gave you the citation today, and I, in fact, read it today. They should not go into internal party matters, or we would be here potentially dealing with all four parties and their issues. Can you imagine if other members started raising points to do with your party?

I understand the gravity of the allegations, but they are being dealt with, I'm told by the Premier today in question period and by the Government House Leader today, as an internal party matter. As such, that means that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 504, which I will not take time to read again, applies. I hope that clarifies that and that having alerted you to that last week would have stood today, particularly since it was from the same party that raised it on Thursday for the first time. These are allegations, and we know how serious they are.

Secondly, I would just further my brief clarification by referring all members to page 636, which is also in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, with respect to ruling on a point of order, and here for your short emolument and edification is the following statement on page 636.

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker has the duty to preserve order and decorum and to decide any matter of procedure that may arise. The Chair is bound to call the attention of the House to an irregularity in debate or procedure immediately, without waiting for the intervention of a Member. In addition, the Speaker decides questions of order once they have arisen and not in anticipation. Though raised on a point of order, hypothetical queries on procedure cannot be addressed to the Speaker nor may constitutional questions or questions of law.

When a point of order is raised, the Speaker attempts to rule on the matter immediately. However, if necessary, the Speaker may take the matter under advisement and come back to the House later with a formal ruling. In doubtful cases, the Speaker may also allow discussion on the point of order before coming to a decision but the comments must be strictly relevant to the point raised.

And then it goes on and talks about other authorities. You can read the rest for yourselves.

Suffice it to say that I have clarified this now, and I hope I don't have to clarify it again for anybody tomorrow. We understand the gravity of the situation. I did allow the questions. I listened very intently last Thursday to every single word that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona phrased and found those to be okay. They didn't break any rules as such. Today it was clear by the member's own admission that he was dealing with an internal party matter.

So that brings that point of clarification to a close, and the matter is now concluded and ended. Thank you.

I believe there was another point of order that the Minister of Justice had. Did you have another?

Point of Order Tabling Documents

Mr. Denis: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think you've spoken mostly on this. I rise, again, on 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) but also *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 504, that you've enunciated. The tabling from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, again, deals with a party matter, and it is highly irregular to table legal documents in this Chamber. I would suggest that these tablings are, respectfully, out of order.

The Speaker: I'll have a look at that. I don't know that there's anything illegal about what was tabled, but I want to review the wording and the content. So I'll reserve judgment on this until tomorrow, and maybe there'll be some clarification required on that. Otherwise, they will be allowed to stand as they are. However, should it be necessary, I will come back to the House with another comment on this tomorrow.

Mr. Saskiw: Will we have the opportunity to argue on this point? Are you going to make a determination tomorrow? Can we make a submission on this today, or will you allow us the opportunity to make the submission tomorrow?

The Speaker: Please allow me the time to at least look at the Blues. As I indicated, I was looking up the very point on that ruling during the tabling, and I was caught a bit off guard by it. So I do want to review it, and then I'll let you know the procedure tomorrow. Okay? Thank you very much.

Let us move on, then.

3:20

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: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

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

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is indeed my pleasure to speak to Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. I would like to thank the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for his leadership in bringing forward this

legislation to allow six-storey wood buildings in Alberta. This bill has helped to drive the adoption of six-storey wood building requirements as part of the Alberta building and fire codes. Alberta is now at the forefront of evidence-based standards for six-storey wood buildings because of the initiative of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and his leadership. Six-storey wood buildings combine the very best of safety standards, environmental sustainability, affordability, and innovation.

I am pleased to table today a draft amendment to Bill 203 that helps to clarify the importance of the regulations under the Safety Codes Act. This draft amendment calls for six-storey wood buildings to be constructed in accordance with the regulations under the Safety Codes Act. Mr. Chair, would you like me to wait before I read out the amendment?

The Chair: Just pause, hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely.

The Chair: We'll have the amendment distributed. Being the first amendment, this will be A1.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you.
Should I proceed, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mrs. McQueen: Okay. I move that Bill 203, Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, be amended in section 2 by striking out the proposed section 65.1 and substituting the following:

Wood construction
65.1 A building that is 6 storeys or less in building height may be of wood construction if the building meets the requirements of this Act.

With this amendment the Ministry of Municipal Affairs strongly supports Bill 203, recognizing the demand for six-storey wood construction across the nation. The technical building requirements are published in the Alberta building code, which comes into force starting May 1, 2015. A wide range of code, building, fire service, engineering, and other experts developed these codes through the National Research Council. The proposed amendment ensures these structures will be constructed based on the work of these experts.

Some of the specific safety measures that will be mandatory with this type of building construction include protection during construction of the building. One of the leading causes of fire at construction sites is arson. The additional items outlined in the national standards for six-storey buildings will further enhance the security of the construction site against unauthorized entry and help reduce the risks of intentional or accidental ignition after hours, when arson is most common.

Mandatory sprinkler systems to protect against high-intensity residential fires, which were adopted in the national building code. The application of the sprinkler system was expanded to areas such as attics and balconies.

Street access to the building. Another safety measure that would be mandatory for this type of building construction is a requirement for at least one street access to the building. This provides emergency responders with increased ability to access the building's exterior and interior, and it could help limit the spread of fire.

Fire rating of roof assembly. Typically in sprinklered buildings the roof assembly is not required to be provided with a fire-resistance rating. However, for six-storey wood buildings the fire-

resistance rating for the roof would be not less than one hour. This means that the materials used in the construction of the roof will provide protection from flame and heat for a period of at least one hour based on tested conditions. This limits the risk that a rapidly developing fire will spread to the roof space, which could lead to the spread of fire to an adjacent space or building.

Structure and earthquake design. These standards would reduce the risk of building sway and shear force such as stress on the building walls caused by seismic activity, that can lead to building collapse.

Ceiling and drainage. The standards would also require designers to consider wood shrinkage in their designs. This will protect against moisture penetration of the wall and roof system or the building envelope, which is the exterior shell of the building. This means that the ceiling and drainage requirements of six-storey buildings will have increased protection.

Emergency power. The duration of emergency power for fire alarm and emergency lighting would also be increased from 30 minutes to one hour for buildings.

As Minister of Municipal Affairs my first priority under the Safety Codes Act and the Alberta building code is the public safety of all Albertans. I wish to emphasize that these changes in no way affect the choice of designers and builders to build with other materials such as concrete or masonry. This is simply another choice that the Alberta building code will provide.

Again I would like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for his initiative and leadership on this important legislation.

Mr. Chairman, you have the copies of this draft amendment to be passed out, which you have done. I thank members for the opportunity to speak on this matter.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

I'll look to any speakers from the opposition.

Mr. Kang: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have heard discussions on this before, and the concern was the firefighters fighting fires, you know, in case the building is on fire. I think with this amendment we can address that, but still there will be concern about fires. That's my only concern about this bill. Otherwise, I fully support this bill. I said that last time, too. This will bring in affordable housing, a demand for lumber, and will create more jobs.

I support the bill, but my concern is with fire only. I think this will address the fire issue somewhat. It may not address it to my satisfaction, but I can still support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I'll recognize next the hon. minister of . . .

Mr. Fawcett: I'll wait till the bill is amended.

The Chair: Okay. So on the amendment. Any other speakers on the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Now back to the main bill.

The hon. Minister of ESRD, followed by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Unless I have some opposition in between.

Please proceed, hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Oh, yeah. Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill, a bill that I think is very

important for the forestry sector, a sector which I as Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development have the pleasure of working with on a day-to-day basis to ensure the vitality, health, and sustainability of the industry as well as making sure that the industry operates in a matter that takes care of our environment and the health of our forests.

What I will say, Mr. Chair, is that as minister for approximately six months now, I've toured many of the mills and facilities that this industry has in this province. At every one that I tour, I am amazed at the level of innovation that goes into this particular industry. I think regular Albertans – probably I would include myself as one of those – kind of have our traditional way that we think of the forestry industry, you know: a bunch of lumberjacks that climb trees, cut them down, and the next thing you know, there are two-by-fours that are being pounded in to build our houses and those types of things. But I can assure you that it's a much more sophisticated industry than that, that it's come a long way both from an environmental standpoint and how we manage our forests but particularly on the innovation side.

3:30

In fact, I believe that just over I would say the last five years a lot of our mills have become 15 per cent more efficient in productivity. That's an indication of how much this industry is investing in being innovative in how they operate. One of those things is certainly in the innovation of the kinds of products that they are producing. I think that what this particular bill does is that it allows them to be more innovative and have more options available when they look to what kinds of products they want to develop and sell to consumers and to customers.

Mr. Chair, you know, it's very important that we ensure that any of our buildings or structures are safe and that public safety comes first. We cannot compromise the public safety of our buildings and our structures for economic purposes. But, as I was mentioning, there have been a number of advances from an engineering standpoint, from a product development standpoint that suggest the time is right to allow for this change to take place. This will provide builders many more opportunities to be flexible around the types of materials that they use from both an architectural standpoint and an economic standpoint, so I really like that positive aspect of it. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs just indicated, we're not forcing any builder, any architect, any engineer to use any one particular type of material, but this does give the opportunity for those producers of wood products to go out and market their products as an economically viable alternative to the ones that are currently used. That is a very positive step in the right direction for our forestry industry.

We all know of the economic challenges that we're facing in this province right now. They've been talked about at length in this Assembly so far this session. But there is one area we can be quite proud of, Mr. Chair, and that is our forestry industry, for the reasons that I just mentioned before. This is just one more, I guess, notch in the belt for the forestry industry to become an even more economically viable player within our economy.

For that, as minister responsible for forestry I can only commend the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for bringing forward this initiative at this time. I believe the time is right and we shouldn't hesitate as an Assembly in passing this bill so that we can let our businesses, whether they be in the forest sector or the building sector, start to make the decisions that will allow this province to become even more economically viable, to have more choices available. That's really what this bill leads to.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll sit down and cede the floor to someone else. I encourage all members to make sure we support this bill and get it back.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014. Just a couple of brief comments. I think this is an example of a type of bill that should in fact be on government business. You know, we have the member opposite. He's got a fair amount of pull. I'm sure he could probably put this on government bills. The reason I say that is that I think the proper process here, that could have taken place with Bill 203, is that you go into second reading. Obviously, the vast majority of the members would approve of the overall intent. But then you put it to a committee where you have proper consultations so that a full series of amendments could be proposed and then come back to this Assembly at Committee of the Whole, put forward a series of substantive amendments, and then have them pass.

Of course, we were lucky in this circumstance that there was a break in the sitting, so there was apparently some time for a bit of consultation where one of the hon. ministers put forward an amendment that she probably drafted based on some of the feedback that was provided. If this is such an urgent bill, if this is a bill that the government wants to pass right away, if the industry wants it, and all these other things, as the member opposite stated, that we shouldn't wait to pass this bill, if it's that important, put it as government business. The government then has the ability to make sure that it's shepherded through reasonably and quickly whereas this bill right now, depending on when a potential election is called, may not even pass.

That's my main argument, Mr. Chair, that on bills like this it makes no sense not to put this directly on government business and leave private members' business for other measures that aren't, obviously, on this government's agenda that's being put forward.

Mr. Chair, we look forward to seeing the final reading of Bill 203 before passing final judgment on it. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the last speaker, the hon. member, for sharing that with us. He somewhat missed the point of private members' business, which is that the private member gets to decide what the business is.

Such being the case, I have to inform the House that it's with a slightly heavy heart that I rise today. I do want to congratulate the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and I know I spoke to the bill in support of the industry in second reading. This makes a lot of sense, that we should build wood structures six stories high. It's done in other jurisdictions. Wood, as I said, is a renewable, remarkable, sustainable building material. It's one of the best insulators out there, a natural insulator, and it really speaks to the energy of a fantastic Alberta business. But we always watch for unintended consequences of the bills that we pass in this Legislature, and I want to point one out, Mr. Chair, and that is that it exposes a fundamental flaw in the children's fairy tale that any of us in this House that had children told to our children. That, of course, is the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. In this story – I'll recount it quickly if you'll allow me.

Of course, with the *Three Little Pigs*, the first pig built a house of straw, and the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down.

The second little pig built a house of sticks, and the wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down. Of course, the third little pig built a house of bricks, and the wolf was unable to huff and puff and blow his house down, and that's the end of the fairy tale that we all grew up with and that we all understood.

Actually, the flaw in that tale – and it's exposed by this bill – is that that didn't end the tale. Of course, when winter came, the poor little pig in the brick house came close to freezing to death and starving to death. As he went out in search of food, fortunately there was a pile of straw nearby from the first little pig's house. He went out in search of heat. Fortunately, there was a pile of sticks nearby from the second little pig's house. But he got caught by the wolf, who was smart enough to know that he wouldn't survive the winter in a stone house.

I can propose a revision to the fairy tale, and that is that there actually was a fourth little pig, Mr. Chair, and that fourth little pig built a house of wood, a sturdy house, that was warm and comfortable and welcoming in the wintertime, and he was smart enough to build the thing six stories high. As time went on, he opened up a home for wayward pigs. It's just a wonderful story from there on.

Mr. Chair, wood is a part of our national identity. It is a beautiful, remarkable, environmentally responsible building material. We are known as hewers of wood and drawers of water. We've built our houses out of wood since the beginning, and our First Nations partners did it before them. We've taught the world a lot about how to manage forests and how to build things out of wood, and I hope we continue to do that in our children's and grandchildren's lives. I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for having the vision to bring it forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers?

If not, I'd invite the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne to close debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I was bugged by a number of my colleagues today asking me: "Why are you wearing a green tie today? It's not St. Patrick's Day." I said, "I wear a green tie today to stand for everything that Bill 203 stands for: green, sustainable, and looking into the future, as most of us all know."

It's my pleasure to rise and offer some concluding remarks, but before I do, I want to thank all members of this House for being so supportive. The folks that are here with us today, the organizations like the Alberta Forest Products Association, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, the Canadian Wood Council and Wood Works! have been very strong advocates of Bill 203, and I want to thank them for their attendance here today.

3:40

Mr. Chair, the safety of all Albertans is paramount in all that we do. Bill 203 will ensure that this continues to be a top priority. Fire-resistant ratings for floors and roofs must be met and require a fire-resistant rating that is the same as any other material, whether it be steel or concrete. Sprinkler systems must be designed to meet the National Fire Protection Association 13, or NFPA 13. Exterior wall cladding must be noncombustible on a minimum of 90 per cent of each material face, and 25 per cent of the building parameter must be within 15 metres of a road, allowing firefighting access. This will enable full and proper access to homes of Albertans when they are faced with an emergency situation. The minimum emergency power must be exceeded by 60 minutes so that proper action can be

implemented when emergency situations arise. Finally, buildings must be constructed at a minimum distance from the property line.

I think the comments from my colleagues were evident that there's wide support for this bill. I'd offer these concluding remarks and thank everybody for their input.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 203, the bill to amend the Safety Codes Act.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 203 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.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Chair, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 9(1) to proceed to third reading.

The Chair: That would be after. We would rise and report, and then . . .

Mr. Denis: I'm sorry. So I would ask that we rise and report. My apologies, sir.

The Chair: I'll offer you the opportunity to ask that question again, hon. Government House Leader.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 203. The committee reports the following bill with amendments. I wish to table copies of all the 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.

Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Little Bow, does the Assembly concur in the report? Agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd ask all members in the House to allow me to go to the third and final reading, so I'd ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 9(1) and proceed to third reading of Bill 203.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved to waive the provision to allow the House to go straight to third reading of Bill 203. This requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third 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 thank you to all the hon. members who rose to speak today. I think that my concluding remarks will be very short and very brief. The members of this Assembly have been very outspoken in support of this bill, industry has been very outspoken on this bill, and I'd ask for third and final call.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

There is an opportunity to speak. Are there any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has moved to close debate on third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

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

Bill 204 Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to begin debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014.

The purpose of Bill 204 is to increase punishment for distracted driving by amending the Traffic Safety Act to include a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerits for each distracted driving offence. Currently the punishment for distracted driving is \$172. Alberta's distracted driving law came into effect in September 2011. The original intent was to reduce and prevent incidents of distracted driving. Under the legislation drivers could be charged and given a \$172 fine; however, it has become clear that this is not a great enough deterrent.

I had the pleasure to meet with the inspiring Renaye Wade last week. This young woman suffered a crushed pelvis, a broken jaw, and a severe brain injury that left her in a coma for 34 days after her car was struck by another vehicle. The driver who struck Wade later pleaded guilty to careless driving. She is a passionate advocate for stiffer distracted driving penalties, and after meeting with her, I felt stronger than ever that we must act now to prevent distracted driving on Alberta roads.

The current law hasn't noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving. Mr. Speaker, RCMP Corporal Chris Little has said that distracted driving incidents have actually risen since legislation was first introduced. He has said that incidents of distracted driving are worse than ever. The deterrents currently in place are not working. Distracted driving leads to accidents and even fatalities, yet this is easily preventable. Bill 204 can help to greatly reduce those incidents.

Mr. Speaker, technology has provided us with a lot of great things, but we sometimes find ourselves multitasking with our phones, our GPS, our iPads. These distractions lead to driving errors. Driving errors are a factor in 87 per cent of total collisions in Alberta. When it comes to driving, it requires our full attention. Texting takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 88 kilometres an hour that is like driving an entire football field blindfolded.

Mr. Speaker, no Albertan should be put at risk because of careless, distracted drivers. Distracted drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than attentive drivers. Cellphones are one of the most common distractions. Drivers who are texting are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or near crash event compared with nondistracted drivers. International research shows that 20 to 30 per cent of all collisions involve driver distractions.

There needs to be a behavioural change amongst drivers. The deterrents currently in place are not working. That is why I am proposing these changes in Bill 204. Alberta has one of the lowest provincial fines for distracted driving. Distracting driving punishments in Canada range from \$100 to \$280. Some fines rise with the subsequent number of offences. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 would position Alberta's distracted driving laws as some of the toughest in the country.

The annual social costs of a motor vehicle collision in terms of loss of life, medical treatment, rehabilitation, lost productivity, and property damage are measured in tens of billions of dollars in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Even if that were divided equally among the provinces, that represents over \$1 billion. That number can be significantly reduced by preventing distracted driving.

3:50

The addition of three demerit points may be an even stronger deterrent than the fine itself. While many Albertans can afford to pay the \$172 fine and treat it as a minor inconvenience, a three-demerit fine can lead to a suspended licence and pose a serious punishment for what is a serious infraction. A new, harsher punishment I believe will encourage more people to take steps to ensure they are not breaking the distracted driving law.

Reducing distracted driving involves strong legislation, education, and enforcement. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 allows us to do our part by ensuring strong legislation. Distracted driving laws do more than just restrict people from texting or calling. There are many other potential distractions that drivers need to be aware of such as using electronic devices like laptop computers, video games, cameras, et cetera. Entering information on a GPS unit, writing, printing, or sketching; personal grooming; and pets sitting in the front seat or in the cab can cause distraction. Although cellphone use makes up most cases of distracted driving, these other factors are risks as well, Mr. Speaker. With close to 90 per cent of all collisions caused by driver error, most of which is caused by distracted driving, it is important that we make real, meaningful change to influence people into changing their behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, adding three demerits for distracted driving gives the punishment some real teeth. Drivers can no longer ignore the perils of distracted driving, and if they do, they will be off the road with a suspended licence. By adding this extra deterrent, I believe Albertans would be motivated to enact widespread behavioural changes. The potential of losing one's driver's licence will give Albertans pause before answering their cellphone, replying to a text, or otherwise engaging in distracting behaviour. The physical and possible financial implication of losing one's licence acts as a strong deterrent. We need drivers to focus on the road and not risk their lives and the lives of others by being distracted. Texting and driving kills 11 teens each day in North America.

Changing driving behaviour isn't easy, and although we saw a decrease in distracted driving initially after previous legislation was introduced, it proved to be short lived. For behaviour to be truly changed long term, Bill 204 is needed. It will not happen overnight, Mr. Speaker, but by increasing the fine and adding demerits, we can make significant strides and really tackle this devastating problem. It is time to stop needlessly endangering Albertans on our roadways, time to stop the avoidable accidents as fatalities attributed to distracted driving, time to give our law enforcement officials legislation that can help them reduce these careless accidents and make Alberta roads safer for all Albertans.

Bill 204 isn't dictating to Albertans, Mr. Speaker; Bill 204 is responding to Albertans. Albertans want harsher penalties for distracted driving because they see it endangering those around them. Ultimately, it will be Albertans who dictate whether or not this bill will be successful in reducing distracted driving. For there to be meaningful change, societal change has to occur. Distracted driving should be treated with the same social stigma as drinking and driving for it can have the same deadly consequences. Bill 204 can spark this conversation amongst Albertans and show that the Alberta government is serious about the dangers of distracted driving. Our leadership can bring about real change in the way Albertans think about distracted driving.

This is more than a problem amongst teenage and early-20s drivers. People of all ages have been guilty of letting themselves become distracted by one thing or another while driving, Mr. Speaker. We need to introduce tough legislation now and spur societal change. Then, hopefully, we will not have to wait a generation for distracted driving to become unacceptable. Anyone not getting that message risks losing their licence as well as hefty financial fines.

Government has often been slow to adapt to changing technology. It would have been difficult for anyone to predict the exact dangers new technology would cause. However, Mr. Speaker, now that we have seen the dangers and reviewed the statistics and evidence, we can no longer turn the other way and let this behaviour continue. These changes proposed in Bill 204 need to be made to protect Albertans and help keep our roads safe.

I look forward to hearing the debate on this subject and encourage all my colleagues in the House to participate and to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand up and tentatively, if I may, support Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. The idea of second reading, obviously, is to discuss the intent of the bill, and I'm going to be listening to the conversation. I think what's going to be more important is when we get into Committee of the Whole. I like where this member is going because I'm one of those drivers that are on the road continuously, and I can't tell you how frustrated I get when I'm driving, whether it's in the city or whether it's on highway 2. I am wondering what the driver in front of me is doing as they're weaving on the highway or, for that matter, on the street. I can be somewhat nosy at times and catch up to them and find out that they're texting. Most of the time that's what I see, them texting. I have been known to give a honk of my horn and just let people know how I feel about that, as the Member for Calgary-East has explained in his notes and as we saw in the gallery last week when he introduced the young lady who had been so severely injured by a distracted driver.

I think what's important to me is that we brought this legislation through three years ago, the distracted driving legislation. I haven't heard a lot of comments back and forth about: has it increased, has it decreased, how many more tickets have been given? Fortunately – knock on wood – Mr. Speaker, I have not been the recipient of a lot of tickets. I say that and hope that I'm not jinxing myself on that. We originally had legislation on driving without – I think, it's due care and attention legislation. I'm somewhat confused if this has kind of been absorbed into I think it was Bill 16, the distracted driving legislation. I'm not sure if police – maybe the Justice minister and Solicitor General knows if the police can still ticket for undue care and attention or if it's under . . .

Mr. Denis: Yes, they can.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. Yes, they can.

It's interesting to me to find out in the last three years how many tickets have been issued under the distracted driving legislation. I look forward to the Minister of Transportation providing those details, which I know he can, and exactly what those tickets were for. Were they for texting? Were they for cellphones? That kind of thing. Because I think it's something important to consider as we move forward.

I would also like to know from the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Justice how many more police and sheriffs, for that matter, are going to be hired to monitor this particular piece of legislation. I think that is more important than anything if we're going to be passing legislation, that we have what I consider boots on the ground or in the car, if I can use that, to start monitoring this. I do think the increase in fine is well worth the effort.

But, again, I'd like to see from the Minister of Transportation how many tickets have been given since this legislation was enacted three years ago and what those tickets are for. I'd also like to know whereabouts in the province it is. I know he has access to that. If it's in the city, if it's in the rural areas, I think that's important to know because then we'll know where we have to put the boots on the ground, if we have to put more sheriffs in the rural areas. Do we have to put more police in the urban areas? Is that the priority for the police officers?

4:00

The three demerit points. I think sometimes that you're all in or nothing. I, honestly, have seen what, to me, is a travesty when you're driving, and to this day we still see people texting. The information that I've been able to access briefly just after the Member for Calgary-East introduced this bill is that it's young people that are most distracted on this type of stuff. He did mention, you know, eating, putting on lipstick, dogs, kids, and all those things, but I really feel that the biggest distracted driving issue is texting and probably cellphones.

I was trying to do some research just before question period, but of course it's very busy. I came across a research page that talks about the 10 most distracted places. I didn't have enough time to even pull it up. It was one of those where it talks about the 10th and what it was doing, and then you have to go to the next slide, and it's the ninth and the eighth and the seventh, all the way down.

I think it's incumbent upon the minister to provide us that information. I know he's probably wanting to get up and speak to this bill. I'm sure he's getting up to speak in support of this bill. If he could provide to the House, as I said, how many tickets have been issued since this Bill 16, I think it was, the distracted driving legislation, was brought in, what those distracted driving tickets were, and what areas of the province they were in, I think that will

give us a good idea of how many more police or sheriffs we will have to add for this when this bill is passed.

I look forward to Committee of the Whole as we move forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'll recognize the Minister of Transportation next.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could answer those questions specifically, but I'll wait. I've seen all those numbers, and I know them, but going off the top of my head, I don't want to misquote, so I'll bring them back to Committee of the Whole. I could almost say the number, but I would be afraid I might be wrong. It is lots; I have seen the stats. I'll bring that back to committee.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Transportation I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. Before I begin my comments, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. His commitment to the safety and well-being of Albertans is evident, and I commend him for his efforts.

Bill 204 aims to assign three demerit points to anyone charged with distracted driving as defined by the Traffic Safety Act. It also proposes to raise the monetary fine for this offence from \$172 to \$250. Mr. Speaker, I've said before in this House – and I'll say it again – distracted driving is simply unacceptable. It puts everyone on our roads at risk. That's why in 2011 this government enacted legislation that made distracted driving illegal in Alberta, and at the time it was one of the most comprehensive anti distracted driving laws in the country.

But legislation is only one piece of the traffic safety puzzle, Mr. Speaker. We need to use a combination of education and enforcement to encourage Alberta drivers to comply with the law. To this end, we launched the innovative Crotches Kill campaign to educate Albertans in an effort to shift behaviours. We know meaningful change in driver behaviour doesn't happen overnight. It can often take years. In fact, it has taken decades for Alberta to see a 95 per cent compliance rate for seat belts.

Mr. Speaker, my department continues to educate motorists in our efforts to keep Albertans safe on our roads. Last month 16-year-old car driver Parker Thompson from Red Deer helped us launch distracted driving awareness month by speaking to about 600 staff and students at a south Edmonton junior high school about the dangers of distracted driving. His goal is to reach out and educate youngsters, before they start driving, in an effort to create a new generation of Albertans who will grow up knowing how unacceptable distracted driving really is. Mr. Thompson's goal is to travel the province and give his presentation to as many students as possible. It's a bold and innovative approach to ending distracted driving, and his efforts should be commended.

In spite of all these efforts, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't appear Albertans are getting the message. We all have a role to play in reducing the number of deaths and injuries on our roads. Government, law enforcement, and our many traffic safety partners are committed to finding solutions through updates to Alberta's traffic safety plan, which, I'm proud to say, was the first of its kind in Canada when introduced in 2007. Since its introduction the traffic fatality rate in Alberta has decreased by some 22 per cent, and that's while the number of drivers and vehicles on the road has been increasing at the same time. This is clear evidence that our innovative approach to traffic safety is working, but we know we can always do more.

Mr. Speaker, it's important that drivers also realize the important role they play in keeping everyone safe on the road. When we get

behind the wheel, our main task is to stay focused on the road ahead and not on other distractions. We know that every text message that's sent takes our eyes off the road for five seconds. It only takes a second for a collision to occur, and lives can be changed forever. Research shows that between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions are due to distracted driving, and it's very clear some Albertans aren't getting the message. It's also clear that we need to be doing more to address the very serious problem on our roads. The Member for Calgary-East recognizes this and has brought forward this legislation to address it.

Mr. Speaker, while I support the spirit and principle of the bill, the assignment of demerit points and fine amounts is something better done in the Traffic Safety Act regulations. Historically this is where these kinds of changes have always been made, and this is how we adjust sanctions for other traffic violations under the Traffic Safety Act. Making this change in the regulations rather than through legislation also gives government the flexibility to make future adjustments to distracted driving sanctions, should they arise, regardless of whether the Assembly is in session or not. It's quicker and easier to adjust it in regulation.

I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that my reluctance to deviate from the regular process through which we make adjustments to Traffic Safety Act violation sanctions should in no way be interpreted as a reluctance to strengthen penalties for distracted driving. I agree that current sanctions have not served to deter Alberta drivers from driving distracted, especially when it comes to using their phones behind the wheel. My job as Minister of Transportation is to ensure Albertans are able to get where they're going safely and efficiently. Any injury or a fatality on our roads is something I take very seriously and very personally.

In conclusion, I'd like to again thank the Member for Calgary-East for his work on this bill and bringing this issue to the forefront. Mr. Speaker, I'll be voting in support of this bill, and I urge all my hon. colleagues to do the same. I look forward to the remainder of this important debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. I'm pleased to say that our caucus will be voting in favour of this legislation because it's a fundamental piece to ensuring greater levels of safety on our highways and our roads as they relate to Albertans travelling every day from place to place and ensuring that they do so as safely as possible.

This bill introduces new penalties for distracted drivers by increasing the fine and by giving out demerits. It essentially brings Alberta into line with the rest of the country. Strangely, up until now we were the only province that didn't offer demerits as a penalty for distracted driving. As well, until this bill is passed or adopted by the government and passed, we also have almost the lowest fines for distracted driving in the country.

4:10

My big concern, really, if we pass this bill is that the government actually act on it in a timely way, because we understand that as a private member's bill it's not, of course, binding. Really, relative to the rest of the country on something that is as important as this issue, we really are very far behind, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why that is exactly, but that's just the way it is. In B.C. they were slightly lower than us; \$167 was their highest fine. But they've now

changed their legislation and raised it. That's what the government has done, so it's actually been done as opposed to here, where we're just leaving it to a private member's bill. Of course, they also have demerits. In Saskatchewan the maximum fine is \$280. New legislation in Ontario makes the fine between \$300 and \$1,000, so you see that it's being taken more seriously there. Before that, it was \$280, still above where this bill takes us. Then, for instance, in Newfoundland we see that it goes up to \$400.

If we pass this bill and if the government then chooses to make it its own and make it law, because, of course, it's still very much discretionary, then we will be in the middle of the pack. So as much as everybody is making all these various sentimental comments about their concerns for safety, I think we need to keep in mind that all we're doing here is that we're passing a private member's bill that may or may not be brought into law by the provincial government, that takes us from dead, dead last to almost the middle of the pack. As everyone is getting super pumped to give themselves a party about how much they care about public safety, let's be sure that we keep it in context and remember that we're not really quite as excited about public safety as most of the rest of the country.

That being said, we're certainly pleased to at least support this first step for all the reasons that have already been identified. We understand that traffic fatalities and traffic injuries go up dramatically with distracted driving. We also understand that with the increasing complexity of communication devices there's greater and greater temptation for people to engage in distracted driving.

Distracted driving: it's really jaw-dropping when you consider the amount of time people will spend reading things on devices while driving a moving vehicle at, you know, 120 kilometres an hour.

Mr. Denis: That would be speeding.

Ms Notley: Indeed, it would be speeding, but it's something that has developed as a pattern. It costs not only families, of course, when horrible injuries occur, but it costs taxpayers to pay the cost of ameliorating those horrible injuries. So it makes perfect sense that we would move forward on this. As I say, it's long overdue.

We support both the addition of the demerit process as well as the increase in fines. We think that if we were as concerned about public safety as everybody here is talking about, we might actually be putting just a little bit more teeth in this legislation so that we're not moving ourselves carefully and quietly to almost the middle of the pack. Of course, we would also urge this government to move towards adopting this legislation or a more stringent version of it.

This is certainly a very important public safety issue, and I think that as our young people, who are probably more attached to their devices than we could ever possibly imagine, move towards having licences, then this problem is going to grow more and more significantly, and it's going to jeopardize and threaten the safety of Albertans even more. Then there are even some older people out there who have a growing reliance on their devices, as I'm seeing from across the way. That being said, I think that we all know – anyone with a teenager knows – that it's a new way of being. So this is something we need to act on.

I'm pleased to see it come forward. We're pleased to support it. I hope the government will take a more energetic approach to establishing both the demerits and the fines than we see here and, in any event, that we don't allow this bill to lie dormant once it has received the support of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all speakers for their comments but particularly the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this to the forefront. This is an opportunity to save many lives. To the member: thank you very much.

The purpose of this bill would be to increase penalties for distracted driving, including a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerits on each of the offences. Now, presently it's \$172 with no demerits. To give a comparative example, Mr. Speaker, if you exceed the speed limit by 15 to 30 k, which, of course, none of us ever would, it would be three demerits. If you failed to stop at a red light, it's also three demerits. If you failed to stop at a stop sign, it's also three demerits, and if you failed to yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian, it's also three demerits. Now, of course, if within two years you receive 15 demerits on your licence, you are suspended for 30 days. I think this strikes the right balance, adding those three demerits.

The original law came into effect in 2011, and I wanted to thank the former Minister of Transportation, who would often talk about people's texting machines as this law was coming in because there was a lot of controversy at that time. Many have, though, since said, Mr. Speaker, that this law does not do enough to deter people from distracted driving, and many have also said that the current law has not noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving even anecdotally. I've often said in the past that this is something that we would consider if the evidence was there. Police agencies across the province have presented me with this evidence. But also speaking anecdotally, I drive a lot. I drive a lot between Calgary and Edmonton. I think I drove over 40,000 kilometres last year, and I see it absolutely everywhere. Some of the instances are absolutely shocking.

Last week, though, I had the opportunity to really put a human face to what can happen if an individual drives while they're being distracted. I met Renaye Wade. Now, two years ago she was in a car on the Yellowhead Trail when she was hit by a distracted driver and thrown into the path of a semi. I've seen some of the footage from that even. The startling thing is that she was in a coma for 34 days, Mr. Speaker, with a brain injury that very few survive. In addition to her brain injury she had a broken pelvis, tailbone, and jaw. Now, while I've met this remarkable woman and she's had an incredible recovery, some of her injuries continue to challenge her everyday life. What bothers me about this most, though, is how preventable this accident was. Not all accidents are preventable, but accidents relating to distracted driving are 100 per cent preventable.

Now, we've done major strides in this Assembly to tackle drunk driving. Drunk driving has been a problem since cars became widely used. However, cellphone use causing distracted driving is a relatively recent phenomenon. Cellphones have been rapidly adopted. I'm actually advised that this is the most rapidly adopted technology in human history, and it has become a staple in many vehicles. I, for one, have a cellphone charger in my vehicle out of what used to be a cigarette lighter when more people smoked. I'm sure many people here do as well.

I was just as surprised to learn how many people are addicted to their phones, and, Mr. Speaker, I'm guilty. Talk to anyone that works with me; I'm constantly on my phone, trying to keep up, and BBM is the best way to reach me. But that being said, the actual addiction is so prevalent that there is a name for it. It's nomophobia. Nomophobia: that's the fear of being without one's smart phone. That just shows how prevalent that is in our modern-day society. It's when you notice your cellphone is out of sight or, worse even, out of hearing range, and you stop everything until you find it. I can think of loved ones close to me that are in that category. While this is a recent compulsion occurring on a massive scale, it's no wonder distracted driving has become a serious issue.

I found out when I was doing some research here, Mr. Speaker, that Canadians send approximately 10 million messages per hour. Ten million text messages per hour. Of course, I'm not using my phone right now. All too often, though, these texts are sent while driving. This diversion reduces awareness, decision-making, or performance, leading to a risk of driver error or near crashes or crashes, sometimes even fatalities. A driver's awareness of their environment and level of attention to what is happening around him or her when using these devices while driving is reduced. It's time that we toughen up our legislation. It's time that we put demerits on distracted driving.

If I want to say thanks to anyone, it's the Minister of Transportation for hearing me harp about this every time I saw him for the last few months.

Distracted driving is a very real problem with very real consequences, but there are ways around this, Mr. Speaker. One of the simplest solutions for a driver to do is to purchase a Bluetooth device. I have. In fact, many new cars already have a Bluetooth as a standard feature. However, we're still seeing too many people talking on a handheld device, texting while driving, or engaging in other types of distracted behaviour.

4:20

Now, Mr. Speaker, if this legislation is adopted, we are not outliers in this country. I'll give you a comparative. B.C. has a \$167 fine with three demerits, and just to the east Saskatchewan has a \$280 fine with four demerits. That kind of puts us in the middle of the pack, as the last speaker had mentioned.

Also, many law enforcement officials have told me that there is a disturbingly upward trend in distracted driving. Clearly, the current legislation that we have needs to be beefed up. Increasing fines and introducing demerits is one way that we as legislators can help change attitudes and get the message through that distracted driving is not acceptable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all depend on vehicles in this Chamber. I'd say most if not all Albertans do depend on vehicles in one way or another, but the Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly said that driving is a privilege, not a right. No one has a right to drive. It is a privilege that we enjoy as Canadians. That privilege can be taken away, and there have to be some parameters around that privilege. I would submit to you, sir, that we should never see situations like Renaye Wade's, where her right to live as an ordinary young woman has been severely changed because someone was abusing the privilege of driving.

Mr. Speaker, many people talk about legislation like this. They say that it's the nanny state; we shouldn't be doing this. Well, I again ask: what about Renaye's freedom in that particular case? That's the question that I ask. What about her freedom?

Similarly, Mr. Speaker – I'll close with this – I remember as a child that my father, Brian, and I would drive off into Medicine Hat to see my favourite aunt, Pat. As soon as we crossed the border, my father would say to me that this province doesn't have seat belt legislation, and we would think about how ridiculous that was. We adopted seat belt legislation in this province in 1987. At that particular time there was very low compliance in this province for seat belts. I would ask any one of us: do we even think twice about getting into a car, starting it up, and going without putting our seat belt on? In fact, 95.1 per cent compliance for seat belts in 2011. I think that's great. I'd like to see that same level of compliance when we talk about distracted driving. The first step is passing this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to speak to Bill 204, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-East. The bill will affect the following legislation, the Traffic Safety Act, by adding a subsection that will increase the distracted driving fines to \$250 from the current \$172 and give three demerits. You know, the polls have been done, and 93 per cent of Canadians believe that distracted driving is a problem in Canada, and 86 per cent of people have supported demerit penalties for the offence. Distracted driving has taken over. I think it's the number one killer now. I think it's even overtaken impaired driving. When the law was brought in in 2011, I think we should have gone much further, even with the penalty. I wouldn't mind if the penalty was raised not to \$250. Let's hurt the people who are not obeying the law heavily in the pocket. Maybe they will – you know, the demerits are kind of hidden. A person gets demerits, and they forget about this. If there's a heavier penalty, maybe they will keep that in mind before they break the law because they know it's going to hurt them in the pocket.

This is very good legislation. You know, when we are driving on the highway, I have followed people. They do their texting. They're talking on the phone. They're in the inside lane, and they're blocking the traffic. Both lanes are blocked. People are getting, like, mad. They're getting road rage on the highway because people get so upset. Then people are racing to pass the guy on the highway, and that has caused accidents or fender-benders, right? With the distracted driving, like Renaye Wade – she was here – it's totally going to cost somebody's life, or some person could get maimed for the rest of their life, or they're in a wheelchair or whatever, which just costs us money in health care costs as well.

You know, I don't know if it's the enforcement. We brought the law in in 2011, and it didn't make any difference. You look around. People are talking on the phone. They are texting. They are doing whatever. People think a car is there like it's their home, it's their private property, and they can do whatever they want in their car, but that should not be the case. We can bring in all kinds of laws. If there's no enforcement – I think that education and enforcement are going to be the key in saving people's lives and saving people from not getting into accidents, saving people from not killing innocent people.

With this law I think we should follow Ontario's lead, not \$250, you know, \$250 to \$1,000 and three demerits. Let's go all the way and make people think that, you know, breaking the law is going to cost them dearly. I think about the Alberta Liberals. Way back I think it was Mr. Hugh MacDonald who brought in some kind of motion or law against distracted driving. The Alberta Liberal caucus has always been supportive of some kind of law because things evolve. We've got cellphones. We've got the technology, and we have been addicted to the phone, even myself. I've got Bluetooth. Most of the time I'm on the phone, too, but I have Bluetooth. We have all done it. It's not like we're immune to this because I think the cellphone has really taken over our lives. We can't even sleep at night without the phone right on the headboard or whatever.

If we have to legislate to change people's habits, you know, so be it. If it's going to save lives, so be it. If the fines are going to be heavy, so be it. If we have to bring in demerits, so be it. I'm glad finally something is getting done to enforce, to bring in some strict legislation, which will make people think twice before they break the law. Like I said, no matter what kind of law we bring in, if there's no enforcement, I don't think the law is as good as the paper it's written on. So we have to think about enforcement. We have to

put more money into enforcement if we want to have laws which are going to be effective.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we have always supported safety laws, and I'm supporting this Bill 204 as well wholeheartedly. Let's put more teeth into this. Let's be more strict than what it is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Speaker, I am certainly in favour of this legislation, and an essential component of Bill 204 is the addition of penalty demerit points to the monetary fine that is already in place when charging a citizen with distracted driving. As we've heard here today, at present the repercussion for a distracted driving charge is a penalty of \$172. There are no demerit points alongside this monetary penalty. Bill 204 calls for amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to include a steeper monetary fine as well as the introduction of three demerit points for distracted driving offenders. These amendments are proposed to change the penalty for those offences.

Mr. Speaker, the penalties proposed in Bill 204 are the three demerit points and increasing the monetary penalty from \$172 to \$250. It is suggested that an increase in the monetary penalty and the provision of demerit points would lead to the improvement of road conditions by successfully deterring distracted driving. The increase in the monetary fine intends to create a bigger impact on the offender by making them dig deeper into their pockets to pay for their offence. Bill 204 helps to leave a more profound impact on the offender by changing and increasing the consequences provided to them. By increasing the monetary fine, there is a deterrent to the Alberta driver by targeting their pocketbooks. It has been suggested that the driver is more likely to follow the rules of the road when there is a more substantial cost to them for their actions. As it now stands, a \$172 fine is provided to drivers who plead guilty. The increase should make a substantial difference in their driving habits but perhaps only for a short term.

4:30

The hon. member, though, is suggesting long-term consequences in order to have a stronger impact on the driver and their future decision-making. The provision of demerit points is a longer lasting consequence due to the fact that demerits may only be rewarded back to the driver after one year. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's bill directly takes into account the risks of distracted driving with an emphasis on long-term consequences. These long-term consequences support safe driving practices due to the fact that drivers have to work around lost demerit points. This will leave them with less demerit room on their licence for infractions should they find themselves in that position.

Distracted drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a crash than attentive drivers, making it a serious concern for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, with 90 per cent of collisions in Alberta being attributed to driver error, it is safe to say that distracted driving is a serious issue that we as a government have been focused on targeting. With the exception of Nunavut every province and territory in Canada has implemented laws dealing with distracted driving infractions, with an emphasis on cellphone use by drivers.

The Alberta government is dedicated to achieving lower numbers of distracted driving infractions as well as related fatalities. Efficient ways to effectively prevent infractions are taken very

seriously within our government. Bill 204, as proposed by the hon. member, suggests that the increased monetary fine as well as provision of demerit points as the driver's penalty will be efficient as a preventative means.

Mr. Speaker, penalties specific to distracted driving infractions are set within the Provincial Offences Procedure Act. The demerit point program alongside the service of documents regulation oversees demerits for traffic regulation. Demerits for distracted driving have not been brought up within the demerit point program and service of documents regulation. The hon. member's bill moves for contemplation of amendments to the Traffic Safety Act in order to assist in the enforcement of the Alberta distracted driving law.

Other jurisdictions and their distracted driving legislation have undergone a series of incidents where monetary fines are increasing. Ontario is suggesting that they plan also to increase sanctions by including three demerit points and setting the monetary fine at \$1,000. British Columbia is moving to stiffen their policy on penalizing distracted drivers though they already include three demerit points and a \$167 fine. Repercussions to distracted driving infractions range across this country, with a movement at present to include demerit points and increase the fine.

The Alberta government takes these infractions seriously and has every interest in driver and pedestrian safety. Mr. Speaker, every year the number of people killed on our roads is approximate to the population of the number of students you would find in the average elementary school class within our province. Distracted driving can directly affect the driver in ways similar to impaired driving. With this information we know that distracted driving penalties are a serious consideration. The complex task of properly operating a motor vehicle must be taken seriously. Driving is a privilege and not a right.

Mr. Speaker, those of you present here today and who were here last week would have met a young lady, Renaye Wade, who has undergone, as we have heard, a horrendous incident in her life. Many of us were present yesterday when we met on the steps of the Alberta Legislature to mark the second anniversary of this horrific incident that changed Renaye Wade's life forever. Renaye has become a spokesperson for change. We must do better. The financial and emotional costs to families is so immense. Yesterday Renaye outlined the cost to Albertans in the form of how many doctors and how many surgeries and how many hours of rehabilitation that she has had to undergo because for just one second someone's attention was not on the road ahead.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important to consider road safety and pursue the best practices possible in doing so. I commend the hon. member for bringing Bill 204 forward. The issue of traffic safety is important to Albertans and to their government. I look forward to seeing this bill passed by this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to thank the hon. member for being a strong advocate for promoting road and traffic safety and responsible driving.

It is important for Albertans to understand that approximately 25 per cent of all collisions involve driver distraction, and anything we can do to help change serious or risky distracted driving behaviours will have a tremendous benefit. Driving in the province of Alberta is a privilege and not a right. The research speaks for itself, Mr.

Speaker. Distracted driving is a form of impaired driving as a driver's judgment is compromised when they're not fully focused on the road. A driver who is distracted is more likely to be in a crash than drivers who have two hands on the steering wheel and eyes focused on the road. We need to discourage distracted driving and to reduce collisions, injuries, and fatalities resulting from this type of behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, if passed and proclaimed, Bill 204 would amend section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act by adding the following after subsection (4). I thought it would be of interest to review what, actually, the bill states. It states:

A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1 [titled Cellular telephones, electronic devices, etc.], 115.2 [Display screen visible to driver prohibited], 115.3 [Global positioning system] or 115.4 [Prohibited activities].

Also, it includes

- (a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and
- (b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

Currently the penalty for distracted driving is a fine of \$172, and offenders are not penalized with demerit points. Anyone wishing further information in this area can refer to the Provincial Offences Procedure Act procedures regulation. Also, it's important to note that in Alberta drivers that exhibit what is deemed to be more serious or risky driving behaviour could be charged with driving carelessly under the current Traffic Safety Act. The penalty for the existing driving carelessly offence carries six demerit points and a fine of \$402.

As we debate Bill 204, we should consider examining the issue from other jurisdictional perspectives. For example, in June of 2014 the Northwest Territories Department of Transportation almost tripled the fines for distracted driving from \$115 to \$322, which include a 15 per cent victim of crime surcharge. In Ontario the provincial police have indicated that distracted driving is the number one killer on their roadways. In that province it is against the law to operate hand-held communication and electronic entertainment devices, which include iPods, GPS, MP3 players, cellphones, laptops, and DVD players, while you are driving and to view display screens unrelated to your driving. If you break this law, you can receive a fine of \$225 plus a victim surcharge and court fee for a total of \$280 if settled out of court and a fine of up to \$500 if you receive a summons or fight your ticket.

Although the province of Ontario has seen success with their distracted driving law and public education efforts, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recently referred Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act (Making Ontario's Roads Safer), 2015, to the committee for general government. Highlights of the making Ontario's roads safer act include increased fines for distracted driving, from a current range of \$60 to \$500 upward to a range of \$300 to \$1,000. This would become one of the highest fine ranges in Canada for distracted driving. In addition, it was proposed that regulatory changes would apply three demerit points and add a distracted driving prohibition to the existing graduated licence system driver's licence conditions.

4:40

In October 2014 the province of British Columbia – traffic violations are under the heading Careless Driving Prohibited, section 144, where it states in subsection (1):

- A person must not drive a motor vehicle on a highway
- (a) without due care and attention,
 - (b) without reasonable consideration for other persons using the highway, or
 - (c) at a speed that is excessive relative to the road, traffic, visibility or weather conditions.

Also, it includes subsection (2), which states:

A person who contravenes subsection (1)(a) or (b) is liable on conviction to a fine of not less than \$100 and, subject to this minimum fine, section 4 of the Offence Act applies.

A driver found using a hand-held electronic device while driving may receive a \$167 traffic violation ticket that also carries three penalty points, Mr. Speaker. Offences and infractions that include penalty points will remain on a person's driving record in Ontario for five years and can lead to further penalties, including a driving prohibition. Stricter limitations are also imposed on drivers in the graduated licensing program, GLP, as risks are demonstrated to be higher among new and young drivers due to a combination of inexperience and a tendency toward greater risk taking and significantly higher than average use of electronic devices, and all combined make this group of drivers particularly vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, these examples demonstrate that legislators are taking a renewed active interest to fight the problem of distracted driving head-on. Distracted driving is both dangerous and intolerable. Many had initially hoped that education and awareness campaigns against distracted driving would result in changing driving behaviours. In many cases it is too early to determine whether increased severity in penalties will have the desired effect in jurisdictions that have adopted such measures.

But what we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that demerit points are a far more onerous penalty than mere fines. As such, there is good reason to believe that adding demerits as a penalty may be a far more compelling deterrent for distracted driving. The increased penalties proposed by Bill 204 simply reflect a broader intent and a broader trend that have been occurring in other provincial jurisdictions. It is clear that the hon. Member for Calgary-East believes that we should, and he makes a very strong case for the change.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to add to the debate. I support Bill 204 and look forward to hearing alternate perspectives. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to speak to support Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to begin by acknowledging the efforts that this hon. member has made, not only representing his constituency but, actually, all Albertans. I'd like to add that as the MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood I personally have met numerous constituents who expressed similar concerns to those this hon. member has brought forward, and I'm sure they will be very happy to see me speak on their behalf to support this one.

Bill 204 has significant value in that it brings the issue of traffic safety to the forefront to be debated and discussed. For this purpose here, I'd like to bring some studies and facts showing how Canada and the U.S. are contributing to this issue here. Federally, Canada has made strides in areas of education and awareness regarding distracted driving. National statistics point to a very strong correlation between distracted driving and road safety. According to the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators, or CCMTA, distracted driving is a diversion of attention from driving as a result of drivers' focusing on a nondriving object, activity, event, or person. They included a whole list of things, including using cellphones.

The organization conducted studies and has concluded that using devices while driving reduces drivers' awareness of their environment to the extent that they are not paying attention to what

is happening around them. The study concluded that it has shown an increase in chances of a collision from 38 per cent to 400 per cent. That's a very large number. In 2006 a survey of the Canadian public about distracted driving was conducted, and it found that two-thirds of respondents were concerned about cellphone use while driving. The study focused on cellphone use while driving in the previous seven days. It was reported that 37 per cent of respondents admitted to using their cellphones, but this was even higher in those aged 16 to 34; it rose 55 per cent. Overall, about 3 per cent of Canadian drivers were observed to be using cellphones by the study commissioned by the CCMTA.

Another study in Canada was carried out in 2009 and 2010. This one indicated that Alberta is among the worst in our nation for offenders, people driving while being distracted, with 4.9 per cent of drivers being observed using cellphones while driving. The next-worst offender is Nova Scotia, with 3.6 per cent.

The public awareness about the risks of distracted driving in general and the use of telecommunication equipment while driving in particular can be increased so that distracted driving is no longer acceptable. Even though the use of hands-free devices is not prohibited for most drivers, research has shown that they can be just as distracting as hand-held devices. Awareness of the risk of hands-free equipment needs to be increased, and I think our Canadian colleagues and CCMTA stakeholders have done a great job of raising public awareness. Recently they launched the Leave the Phone Alone pledge campaign, and the whole purpose for that is to increase public awareness.

Mr. Speaker, let me take a few seconds to compare how our brothers to the south, the U.S., are comparing to us in terms of their studies and research in this area. The U.S. Department of Transportation regulatory campaign against distracted driving is a multimode effort that includes automobiles, trains, planes, commercial vehicles. On September 30, 2009, President Obama signed an executive order directing federal employees not to engage in text messages while driving government-owned vehicles, when using electronic equipment supplied by the government, and while driving privately owned vehicles when they are on official government business. The order has encouraged federal contractors and other entities doing business with government to adopt and reinforce their own policies balancing texting while driving on the job.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, or FMCSA, banned commercial truck and bus drivers from texting while driving in September 2010. Later, in November 2011, it banned all hand-held cellphones used by commercial drivers. In February 2011 the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration banned texting with electronic devices while operating a motor vehicle containing hazardous materials in conjunction with the proposed FMSCA act. The Federal Railroad Administration similarly banned railroad employees from using cellphones or electronic devices on the job following the September 2008 Metrolink crash in Chatsworth, California, that killed 25 people.

Many people in the United States are in the process of enacting laws such as banning texting while driving or using the graduated drivers licensing system for teen drivers to help raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving.

4:50

According to the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 2009, 16 per cent of fatalities and 20 per cent of injuries in the U.S. involved a driving distraction. The highest proportion of distracted drivers involved in fatal crashes was under 20 years of age, 16 per cent, followed by those aged 20 to 29, 13

per cent, and light truck drivers and motorists, who are most often distracted, at 12 per cent.

Analysis involving eye glance behaviours indicated that eyes off the road for a duration of greater than two seconds significantly increase the risk of crashes and near-crash situations. Furthermore, the study found that secondary task disruptions such as cellphones contribute to over 22 per cent of crashes and near crashes in the U.S.

Mr. Speaker, as we can see, Bill 204 is a very timely piece of legislation. Again, I would like to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing up this piece of legislation in a timely fashion so we can strengthen the safety of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by Calgary-Fort.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward. I think it is important legislation that we need to move forward on.

I also wanted to take a moment to bring to light another issue, and that is that – I don't know about you – certainly I see someone driving distractedly at least once a day when I'm out there. I mean, it's at least once a day. These people, when they are doing this, are a danger not just to us who share the road with them but to everybody else out there who is sharing the road with them. I do believe that there's something more that we do have to do, and that is that we've got to bring people's attention to it.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that what she does is that sometimes she beeps her horn – okay? – just to say: hey, you shouldn't be doing that. Maybe that's something that we should all be doing whenever we see it occurring. You know, just a little beep-beep could then become a signal for everybody: "Okay. Watch out. Somebody is not paying attention here." Maybe this is something that we should just sort of pay attention to ourselves, and perhaps it might also help bring attention generally to distracted driving. It's maybe something that might catch on to such an extent that people actually stop doing it. I think it's something that might start shaming people to the point where they realize that this is an activity that they do have to stop. So I'd like to bring that to everyone's attention as a suggestion as to how we can all be part of a solution.

Again, thank you very much to the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'm mindful of the time, hon. members, but if we're brief, we might be able to get two more speakers in.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Calgary-West.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Today I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing Bill 204 for debate.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, Bill 204 would amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for persons accused of distracted driving. Currently Alberta experiences one of the lowest fines for distracted driving in comparison with other provinces. Widely supported by Albertans, Bill 204 would introduce demerit points for each distracted driving offence plus an increase in fines. Each offence will be met with a monetary penalty of \$250 plus three demerit points issued on the person's driving record.

Today 90 per cent of collisions are believed to be caused by driver error. Hence, distracted driving is a major issue that must be addressed with diligence and the promise to ensure the safety of

Albertans on the road. Mr. Speaker, in 2004 there were reported 387 fatalities due to distracted driving in Alberta. Soon after 2006 the government launched the Alberta traffic safety plan, which was, unfortunately, still met with 453 distracted driving fatalities. Now, one would believe that with such an initiative we would see fatalities decline, but it was not the case. Instead, fatalities rose by over 60. Finally, in 2010, after the renewal of the traffic safety plan, we saw a record low of 344 fatalities. While this can be seen as a small victory, our job as legislators is still not over.

We currently have one of the lowest distracted driving fines in Canada, with fatalities decreasing in provinces that have implemented harsher penalties. Mr. Speaker, we must implement fines that will deter Albertans from endangering road users. Campaigns alone are not enough; they must be met with legislation that supports them. Furthermore, because our devices are integrated into everyday life, drivers mistakenly assume they can be used safely while operating the vehicle. Nearly 3 Canadian drivers out of every 4 admit to driving distracted on a regular basis. We must work toward lowering the statistics. Data available today conclude that 8 out of every 10 collisions are caused by distracted driving. Text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, as of 2011 there are more than 352 million cellular phones in use in North America. Nearly 15 people die each day in the U.S. in crashes related to distracted driving, and another 1,200 people are injured. Using hand-held cellular phones while driving is now illegal in 71 countries. This is a telltale sign that change must happen now, and legislators must take notice. Campaigns alone are not going to promote the change that we urgently need to protect Albertans. They must implement it in conjunction with appropriate legislative measures. For this I congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-East, who is bringing this forward, and I'm looking forward to hearing from other members.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, I believe you are next on the speaking list. You have about a minute and a half before the clock will summon us otherwise.

Mr. Ellis: Well, then, I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. It is an honour, of course, to rise and speak to you about Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. My focus today is to explain what distracted driving means and how this impacts a person's ability to drive, which can ultimately lead to accidents. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward.

The traffic safety amendment act would enhance the Traffic Safety Act by proposing that monetary penalties be increased from \$172 to \$250 plus the reduction of three demerit points for every offence. The Traffic Safety Act, introduced in 2007, was the first strategy of its kind in Canada and was due to the significantly high number of collisions, deaths, and injuries on Alberta roads. Since the implementation of the plan the numbers have declined considerably, and of course over the past four years traffic fatalities have dropped by nearly 32 per cent. I'm certainly proud to say that I myself have written some of those tickets while I was a police officer in the past. You know, for me, of course, I look at incentives as being a way to further assist in preventing people from driving while distracted, and I certainly believe that this act would help.

5:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I do hesitate to interrupt, but as indicated, the time limit for consideration of this item of business has now concluded, as the clock has just signalled.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed with the next item of business, I had indicated earlier today, when the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, that I would be rendering a decision on that point of order tomorrow. However, I have since spoken with at least one of the opposition members and a couple of others who asked about the ruling. So with their good co-operation I need to indicate a ruling on it today.

I would also preface my comments by saying just a couple of things very briefly. First, whereas many other jurisdictions are quite restricted in what is allowed and what is not allowed to be tabled, our protocols and procedures in this House are actually very permissive. It's not infrequent that we have seen the tablings of such items as affidavits, statements of claim as well as other documents that may or may not contain certain allegations.

Secondly, I would note that previous Speakers have in fact brought this matter of what is appropriate to be tabled and what isn't appropriate to be tabled to the attention of House leaders, and I would again request that our current House leaders might want to review that matter yet again.

In conclusion, I have reviewed this matter, and noting what the past precedents of this House have been, there is no point of order in this instance. That will conclude this matter.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Hon. ND opposition leader, is that you who is up next? Please proceed, then.

Coal-generated Power

507. Ms Notley moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to commit to the immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Motion 507 in Motions Other than Government Motions. I will say that this is kind of exciting for me because in my seven years as an MLA this is the first time our caucus has actually gotten either a motion or a bill up while the House is sitting. So, yes, it's a rare thing. Anyway, I'm pleased to be able to speak to this motion.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, this is an important issue, Mr. Speaker. In October the Premier himself stated that Alberta could phase out coal, quote, more quickly than anybody is doing on the U.S. side of the border and that given that coal plants in Alberta, some of them anyway, are nearing the end of their useful lives, this, quote, gives us an opportunity to do the right thing and phase out coal. That, of course, was a correct statement.

In addition, we know, according to a poll done by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, that 80 per cent of Albertans when asked would like to see Alberta rely more on wind power to help reduce reliance on coal.

We also know that in the fall of 2013 Albertans witnessed the second-largest coal tailings spill in the history of our country as a result of a dam that the government didn't actually even know existed, let alone had inspected. I, frankly, think that the cost of that particular brilliant piece of management is one that we still have not gotten the full accounting of. Certainly, I know that we've not received the report yet about how that happened, so another thing that is overdue. That tailings breach occurred at the same time that the province of Ontario was preparing to shut down its last coal plant and only a year or two after Alberta finished the process of approving yet another coal plant.

You know, there are a lot of reasons why we should be focusing on reducing our reliance on coal, but just let me talk a little bit about some of the targets that I think are reasonable for us to consider. They're not definitive because – you know what? – here's the thing. The government is the one that has access to the resources and the studies and the information in order to actually come up with the best research plan forward. An opposition of four doesn't have as many resources. To some extent that's why we're bringing this forward today as a motion, because we think that where this needs to start is by having this Assembly approve the motion to have a study conducted and completed using all the resources that the government has at its disposal. That would be the responsible thing to do.

We think that we could probably talk realistically about adopting a target of getting at least 90 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2050 by phasing out coal entirely by 2030, by ensuring that we adopt a target, at least, of trying to meet 50 per cent of our electricity requirements from renewable energy and energy conservation by 2030, and by adopting a target of meeting 20 per cent of electricity requirements from renewable energy and energy conservation by 2020. None of that is undoable, Mr. Speaker. All that it requires is strong leadership and a commitment to doing better by our environment.

Now, this government has been very good at making grand statements and putting out a lot of press releases about its so-called world-class environmental initiatives. We know that that's mostly just paper. Probably the most clear example of that is this government's climate change strategy, which has been roundly criticized by our Auditor General. Indeed, in 2008, when our climate change strategy was first put forward, it included a number of targets, but within that, it included a business-as-usual strategy: this is what it's going to look like if we don't act now. Well, guess what? We're actually in excess of our business-as-usual strategy. Not only have we not met our targets; we've actually exceeded the predictions of where we would be in the absence of doing absolutely nothing.

So that's where we are, and that's, of course, why our Auditor General has taken the time to tell us that we do such a bad job on that. That's really problematic, Mr. Speaker, because the fact of the matter is that scientists have come to a consensus that we need to ensure that we do not have the temperature of the Earth go up more than two degrees by 2100, or we're looking at catastrophic consequences. Yet the path that we're on right now as a world means that we're going to hit that level at 2035. So everybody – everybody – has an obligation to do their part, and that includes Albertans. There is stuff we can do, but we haven't been doing it.

Now, the fact of the matter is that we also need to do this from the perspective of promoting and supporting our energy industry overall, as has been talked about countless days and times by folks over on the other side. We have a problem with everybody wanting to take our nonrenewable energy product in their markets, and we have a bit of a black eye, and we deserve that black eye. But there is a strategy to win back some of that social licence, and that is to

potentially eliminate our reliance on coal. Indeed, the greenhouse gas emissions produced right now annually by coal are almost the same amount as what's produced in the oil sands as a whole. It's not quite as much, but it's close, and if we could eliminate that greenhouse gas emission from coal, we would earn a great deal of credibility internationally.

Now, this all sounds really good, but the problem is: will we do it? You know, there are lots of nice proclamations and statements that we've heard, but here's where we sit right now. We're the only province in the country without an energy efficiency strategy. We're the only province in the country without a renewable energy strategy. As I've said, our climate change strategy, which was meant to be redone because the Auditor General told us it was not worth the paper it was written on at this point, has been delayed and delayed and delayed. Of course, now it will be delayed until after the election.

So our record is not good, but we can do better. Now, why would we want to do better? Well, there are the health issues. We know that physicians that are opposed to coal-fired electricity talk about the cost that is experienced through the most measurable health consequences, roughly \$300 million a year as a result of visits to ERs, admissions, asthma, and lost days due to asthma simply because of the impact of coal in our environment right now. So there's a lot of money that could be saved there.

5:10

Imagine how many pre-election press conferences the Minister of Health could have if he had another \$300 million a year. It would be just a gold mine. Also, imagine the health that would be protected and the number of Albertans who would not suffer from the negative health consequences of us being the province in the country that relies the most – the most – by a long shot on coal-fired electricity.

What we need, then, Mr. Speaker, is a plan. We need to do more than talk about why this is a good idea and how it might be a plan and how maybe sometimes we say: you know, hey, that's not a bad idea. We need to do more than that. We need a comprehensive plan, and we need one that all Albertans can be part of. That's why we're bringing this motion forward. Because if that is done, then all Albertans can engage, and we can learn about the pros and the cons: what could work, what won't work, what kinds of challenges we would face, what kind of sacrifices we might have to face, all those kinds of things. But we could do it together, and we could achieve something about which we could be very proud. It would be good for our health, it would be good for our environment, and it would even be good for our energy industry. So it's something that we need to do more work on.

There are so many ways we can do it. We can make an immediate phase-out by relying more on natural gas. We can rely on cogeneration. Ultimately, we have the authority to undo the gift that the Harper government gave to our coal plants by extending their life to 50 years. Move it back to 40, and then look at how we compensate the three plants that could argue that they didn't have fair notice on that one. We need to look at renewables. We need to look at wind. We need to look at solar. We need to look at hydro. But we're not doing that on an organized basis, and, Mr. Speaker, that is something that is long overdue in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion 507 today, which seeks to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030. I do agree, obviously, that reducing coal-

fired generation is one action to address greenhouse gases and climate change, but we're already working at addressing this issue from a balanced social, environmental, and economic perspective. This triple-bottom-line perspective is consistent with this government's approach in addressing all greenhouse gases across our economy, not just in power production, which the member herself pointed out.

One of the most notable actions on this issue is the federal government's new, stricter rules for greenhouse gases from coal-fired plants. Set out in November of 2012, these rules require Alberta's coal plants to retire after they've been in service for between 45 and 50 years. Alternatively, they will need to meet clean-as-gas emissions standards; that is, produce the same emissions level as burning natural gas. Under this schedule roughly 60 per cent of Alberta's coal-fired units will retire by 2029. This is a good time to point out that we're already seeing a decrease in coal-fired generation in Alberta. In 2014 natural gas generation capacity exceeded coal generation for the first time in Alberta's history.

The second action on this issue, Mr. Speaker, is the specified gas emitter regulation. This regulation requires large emitters to reduce their emissions intensity or pay \$15 per tonne into the climate change and emissions management fund. This money is used to fund innovative technologies. To date \$249 million has been invested into 100 clean energy projects such as wind energy and waste heat recycling. And I should point out that the coal industry pays the vast majority of this \$249 million.

A third action, Mr. Speaker, is government's participation in the Clean Air Strategic Alliance Association, or CASAA. CASAA provides strategies to assess and improve air quality for Albertans, and its partners include industry, government, and nongovernmental organizations. CASAA's electricity framework has provided a set of recommendations to government for the management of nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, and mercury air emissions from the electricity sector. All of these actions are being reviewed by the Climate Change Task Force, and these actions are only part of the story.

As I mentioned earlier, Alberta is in the middle of a transition away from coal. In 1990 81 per cent of our electricity came from coal. Currently coal-fired generation accounts for much less than half of Alberta's generation capacity mix. Our system planner, the Alberta Electric System Operator, projects our current coal will decrease by a further 10 per cent by 2030. That would mean a total of only 2,500 megawatts of coal-fired generation remaining in less than 20 years. With this transition in mind, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that power generators are making the prudent choice. We don't want to make any knee-jerk reactions that will undermine the reliability of our electricity system. Albertans expect the lights will turn on when they flick the switch, and coal-fired generation is a critical part of meeting our daily minimum demand or baseload. It is relatively inexpensive and reliable. The cost of building different types of generation to replace coal in a shortened time would have a material effect on Albertans' power bills.

Mr. Speaker, earlier than planned retirement of coal-fired generation would undermine Alberta's open and competitive electricity market. In this market investor-owned companies decide what type of generation will be built and when. The companies that built our existing coal plants did so with the expectation that they would recover their costs over 50 years. Forcing the retirement of the newer units in 2030 would mean that the companies would not realize the full value of their investments. They would lose six to 31 years of operational capacity. But it's not just about the losses; it's what the losses would mean for Alberta's electricity system and for Alberta's consumers.

We only need to look to jurisdictions like Ontario or Germany, for example – often-cited Germany – where well-meaning measures have been taken to promote alternative energy. To accomplish an aggressive phase-out of coal the Ontario ratepayers have paid for delays in new plants and cost overruns. Ontario consumers have seen their bills increase dramatically, and they're expected to continue to increase in the future. Mr. Speaker, Ontario currently charges consumers a global adjustment, which adjusts for the regulated costs of the nuclear and hydro generation, the cost of new gas-fired plants to replace coal generation, renewable electricity build, nuclear refurbishment, and contracted rates paid to existing generators. The global adjustment levels for Ontario for October and November 2014 were about \$100 per megawatt hour. For context, the year to average pool price in Alberta was \$52 a megawatt hour. So if we were to adopt Ontario's global adjustment level, it would triple our power prices, and I'm pretty sure the opposition's polls didn't ask whether Alberta consumers would be willing to bear a triple electricity rate.

This is also true in Germany, where there has been a sharp increase in household electricity bills to offset the subsidies provided by the government to promote the transition. Germany has drifted back to coal power, and unfortunately much of that is produced by brown coal, which has very significant greenhouse gas effects. The graph I saw the other day: in Germany last year 47 per cent of their electricity production was from coal fire.

At a time when Alberta's growth and demand for electricity has been amongst the highest in North America, we cannot go down that road, Mr. Speaker. We cannot cause investors to lose confidence in our system. Over the next 20 years our electricity system will need \$20 billion worth of investments to meet the projected demand. This includes building 12,000 to 14,000 megawatts of new generation to replace the coal units scheduled to retire and build additional capacity to accommodate our growth. The only other way to accomplish this, short of the market-based system that we have, is to do public.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that in addition to Ontario's current electricity rates, Ontario is carrying \$44 billion in utility debt. Quebec carries \$53.7 billion in utility debt.

Mrs. McQueen: How much does Alberta have?

Mr. Oberle: Alberta has zero, Mr. Speaker, in utility debt. We have built an electricity system larger than the size of the province of Saskatchewan since deregulation with not a penny in public debt, and that's the way we're going to keep going.

Mr. Speaker, it's for these reasons that I will not support this well-intended motion, yet I support the intent. We can and we will do better. We will release a climate change strategy that will put Alberta at the forefront. We will release a greenhouse gas strategy and build upon that a renewable energy strategy, electricity strategy that the member calls for, because it's the right thing to do, and it will place Alberta at the forefront. We'll be ready for Paris this year.

5:20

I cannot support this motion in its current form. Our transition away from coal-fired generation needs to balance the pace of change with reliability and the cost to consumers. We need to ensure the reliability of our system and at the same time look at opportunities for innovation. I believe that a responsible course is already being charted out for the phase-out of coal-fired electricity and that we have a full understanding of the effects of early shutdown.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that this motion should be rejected. Thank you for the opportunity to address it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. members, I have quite a long list of speakers, so I just note that.

I'll recognize next the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of ESRD.

Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hearing the minister – and I'm going to respectfully disagree with what the minister just said about being so-called debt free. Alberta subsidizes its market, so-called free market, with a zero-congestion policy to the tune of tens of billions of dollars, and I'm not so sure what the public gets from that. What the motion calls for is a plan to accelerate the decommission of these coal plants. What would that do for Alberta if we actually came up with a plan that sped that up?

Now, this is what's interesting about it. We have a problem accessing international markets. Everyone here recognizes that. Our own industry knows that. What's the problem? Well, the problem really is environmental. We know this. We see the argument south of the border. It is the environmental argument that is hurting us accessing that market, and it still haunts us today. We speak a lot of good words about what we're doing, but what we're not doing is demonstrating actual progress. So as the minister points out about our specified emitters regulations, what it's not doing is actually achieving results. What we need to do is actually achieve results, and we're not doing that. So if we were to put in place a plan – and that's the difference here. We're not talking about shutting the lights off; we're talking about putting in place a plan that could get us further down the road where we can demonstrate to our markets that we are not just promising but we are delivering on environmental progress. That is really the key here.

Now, I'm going to back up a little bit because I want to talk about the SRD committee dealing with the issue of hydroelectricity. We have two primary sources of delivering on an accelerated pace. One is that we could tap into dams. Site C in Manitoba is actually looking for a customer source, a market to access, because they lost the U.S. central states as a market. They've got an incredible excess of hydroelectricity. Now, here's the key. With our zero-congestion policy that we instituted in this province, what happens almost on a daily basis with our coal plants is that B.C. Hydro comes and purchases electricity for around 3 cents a kilowatt hour almost every evening as they dial back their dams, and then during the day, the very next day, they're selling it back to us for 6 cents a kilowatt hour. Those are rough figures.

But that continues on a regular basis. Is that to the advantage of the consumers in Alberta who are paying for all these excess transmission lines so they can do this? We can actually turn around in a plan and start putting some of our own assets to work for us. If we wanted just to develop our own hydro, which I'm in favour of, we can do that. We have to, though, come up with a plan on how we're going to do it.

The second thing is that by running an east-west grid connecting Manitoba and B.C. Hydro – we have the ability to tap into B.C. Hydro immediately, but we've got to get Saskatchewan and Manitoba on board. [interjections] Manitoba is on board. They need another customer. Now, you can giggle about that, but you can't compete with that. That's the problem. The cost of that hydroelectricity is that much cheaper than coal.

The thing about coal is – and it's well established. The Harvard six-city study, which is about 50 years old and has been re-evaluated and built upon decade after decade, shows that for every 10 microns of particulate matter the death rate in a city of a million people increases by 100. Now, here we've got a perfect formula

because you're dealing in the Edmonton area with a city of approximately 1 million people. This gives you an idea of what we're dealing with, never mind talking about nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, mercury, lead, and cadmium, all those nasty things that coal does to us environmentally.

What we have here is the ability, and I don't think we have to subsidize anything. I think what the government needs to do is come up with a plan, just as this motion suggests, and on that plan have the incentives to allow the development in areas where these investors would more than happily go. But you have to make that readily available. An east-west grid does a number of things for us environmentally and for our grid. It stabilizes our grid for a much lower cost energy source.

One of the things that we forget when we compare hydro to coal to natural gas is that hydroelectricity is about 90 per cent efficient. Coal never gets above 50 per cent. Natural gas gets above 50 per cent but doesn't get up into the 60 per cent range. So you're talking efficiencies. The lifespan of a coal plant versus a natural gas plant is somewhat comparable. The lifespan of a hydroelectricity station is 100 years and growing. We always do the comparison as if it's 50 years in cost; it's not.

These are the things. If we develop a long-range plan, we could come up with an economic plan to help us environmentally. One of the things by doing this is to allow us to go to the international markets and say: take a look at our environmental record, not our so-called environmental promises. We don't have the record yet. We need the record. By putting together a plan, we could actually build towards something, and that's really important.

With that, going back to the whole issue of particulate matter, when we look at greenhouse gases, our top five coal generators on that scale are not just the top five in comparison to our oil sands but also are the top five in Canada for producing greenhouse gases. We are dealing with on an international market something that is called the low-carbon standard, and we have to think about that when we're trying to access these markets. We have to lessen our carbon footprint. If we approach the markets arrogantly and say that we do not, we could find ourselves penalized because we did not take advance action or progressive action or proactive action, however you want to call it, to get in front of the market.

I will say this. It is not this government's responsibility to ensure that the investors of these coal plants make their profit. That's their business because they wanted that free market. What upsets me is how much consumers are subsidizing those coal plants on a daily basis, and they're not getting a return. I will tell you this. The whole idea of a grid that has zero congestion is a fallacy, yet we're trying to build to that. That is a subsidy that I believe is not conducive to any market at all. These people should be paying for it if they wanted this so-called market, and they're not. They're being subsidized. It prevents other people from entering the market, and that's just fundamentally wrong, in my view.

Dealing with the issue of the greenhouse gas intensity, the data is absolutely clear on this. Coal as a proportion of the electricity generation in Alberta very rarely – I know the minister made a comment that natural gas finally surpassed the amount of generation, but as you would check right now, at this very moment coal is at around 47 per cent of our generation, and natural gas is right around the 40 per cent level for the baseload. Coal routinely is over 50 per cent of our baseload for this province. We need to reduce that. That needs to be part of a long-range plan to reduce that.

I will tell you this. Alberta has something going for it that we have never ever built upon. Where most jurisdictions would love to go to a distributive generation model, what they lack is the infrastructure to even implement it. What Alberta has is the

infrastructure. We have natural gas all throughout this province. We have natural gas generators located all throughout this province. The natural gas infrastructure is there. What we lack is the political will to make that distributive generation model work so we can make the system more efficient, less costly, and we can then start implementing renewable energy sources so we can actually advance an environmental program that will get us ahead of this curve.

5:30

When I look at the grid and I look at the supply of electricity, what Alberta is lacking is a renewable energy that can cover baseload. That renewable energy is at our doorstep. It's called hydroelectricity. That renewable energy is inside our own home. We have not developed it. We have hydroelectricity potential, and we should tap into that. That needs to be part of the long-range plan, how we can make those investments work, and that would work for Albertans.

Even when you approach our oil sands producers, when they look at the amount of energy they need, if we were to develop the hydroelectricity potential north of Fort McMurray, that services our industry. The other thing is that on an environmental level, particularly dealing with flood mitigation, in water conservation, by having these hydroelectricity dams, we're able to conserve and work with our environment.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. An interesting topic and one that I think is significant to a lot of us, particularly for myself because there's a lot of renewable energy in my riding down south. If you've been down around Pincher Creek and so on, you'll see an awful lot of stuff down there pertaining to renewable energy.

Nonetheless, with respect to the motion that's been made by the hon. member here, what they're asking for – and I think this needs to be underlined a little bit to get us on track here – is that they're looking to do an immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out coal-generated energy. I think we've talked a little bit about the stats and all about the other things to do with coal to a great extent here, and I'm not going to take a lot of time with that. Regardless, just a couple of years ago I was involved on the Resource Stewardship Committee, and we did spend an awful lot of time studying one of the things that the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has referred to, and that is hydroelectric energy.

My suggestion is that the Wildrose is in support of this motion because of two things. First of all, there's a great amount of known information about the harmful effects of these coal-generating plants. We also know that there are a lot of good things about the coal we have here in Alberta, and we have some good technologies to try to offset it. There's no question about that. However, we know that we must move to another source. If the motion is truly about what it seems to be – that is, having a study – I think that the study the Resource Stewardship Committee did on hydroelectric, that spent I don't know how many months doing so, is a great start. I think that this motion could be carried out with little cost and could be, you know, easily accomplished by taking the report that the Resource Stewardship Committee had already filed to the House, dated March 2013, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oberle: What did they recommend?

Mr. Stier: They recommended an awful lot of stuff. I'll get to that.

In any regard, I think it would be a good start, an extra study to look into how coal plants could be phased out. We could phase over to perhaps hydroelectric as an alternative. That would be a good alternative.

You know, I have some other points here with that in mind. Just for those of you that weren't involved with that committee, we know that eventually we're going to have to phase out coal generation at some point in time. I think we've all agreed to that here. There are some viable alternatives down in my area. We have a lot of wind energy, as I've said, and there's been a lot of talk about solar and so on and so forth.

But nothing is more efficient, from the report that we did, than hydroelectric. Certainly, there are some costs. I'm sure that that is what the minister is kind of chuckling about at the moment. Regardless, as we're looking at this motion and trying to figure out how to move forward – after all, this motion is only to do a bit of studying on how we could move forward – I don't necessarily find the humour in it, quite frankly. We have some good recommendations that we worked upon. There are ways that we can go about this.

You know, these run-of-river systems that they put in place nowadays for the hydroelectric types of plants are marvellous systems. They can include sluiceways that will allow wildlife to be protected, and fish and so on can still travel through the various watersheds, et cetera. It's probably one of the most efficient ways that we can go, and today it represents 60 per cent of Canada's energy portfolio, but it only accounts for 6 per cent in Alberta. It was our conclusion that this was something that we should pursue as soon as we could. It's an untapped potential. It's something that makes good sense as we go ahead. We've already got the information.

To conclude, really, we know that the coal is critically important to current power generation and consumption needs in Alberta, but we must acknowledge that there are other ways to go about phasing it out. I think that I would like to encourage the government to explore these alternative methods, including hydro. The report is done. We're talking about doing an extra study just to see how we could phase coal out. I don't see why we would be against this motion to study a little further. We've already got a lot of the information. You know, yes, we are moving to clean-burning propane and natural gas and all that kind of thing, but this motion is only asking for a study, people. We do a lot of studies in this business, it seems. Some of the information is here. Let's just supplement it, as has been suggested by the hon. member.

That's about all I have to add at this time, Mr. Speaker. I'm in favour of this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the Minister of Finance.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to stand and support Motion 507, which will accelerate the phase-out of coal electricity in the province. You know, it's interesting to hear the government talk about a holistic approach in 2015. Unfortunately, if it is being done, it's not being shared with the rest of us because we've seen 30 years of anything but comprehensive analyses and proper planning for the benefit of Albertans. We've seen short-term decisions made, incentives given, failure to take into account externalities, external costs, including the health and social and environmental costs.

Now we see a government that is struggling to sell its primary products because of our failure to do comprehensive analysis and look at full-cost accounting. By full-cost accounting, of course, I

mean starting with the impacts of mining, the social and health and environmental impacts of the mining itself, then the transportation, the impacts of the building of the coal-fired generators, the jobs that that creates relative to the jobs other energy-producing industries would create, the greenhouse gases, the pollutants, including mercury and other contaminants, that have added their impacts to our environment and reduced our international reputation.

To tout in this House that there's been a broader approach, a triple bottom line, in 2015 begs the question of where this government has been for the last 30 years as we've paid the price in human lives, in social disruption, in environmental contamination, and now in rivers that we can't eat the fish out of because the mercury levels have exceeded the health advisory, in most southern rivers, at least, in this province. Without doing a proper analysis, a full-cost accounting on other, alternate energies such as hydro, such as wind and solar, we're not getting true cost accounting.

This government talks about a level playing field, but we don't have anything like a level playing field. We've been subsidizing the fossil fuel industry for 75 years, and suddenly we're hearing from the government that they want a level playing field. Solar producers get the minimum price because they put in as they're able to while the coal companies got up to \$690 a kilowatt hour last year at the peak demands in the summer. At the same time solar producers were getting \$15 a kilowatt hour. At the same time the coal companies were able to bid at the last minute for the highest price, which is something like \$690 a kilowatt hour. What kind of a level playing field is that when it's so stacked against the renewables, that actually produce greater numbers of jobs, that actually produce much less, if any, pollution – and solar, obviously, produces virtually zero – and indeed add to our international reputation such that our own primary fossil fuel industry could gain a stronger foothold in international markets?

5:40

The other issue that, unfortunately, isn't talked about enough is demand reduction. We constantly talk about energy production, energy needs, but we fail to look at the demand side of energy and how much we could be doing by providing incentives for retrofitting buildings, commercial and residential; helping people with energy-efficient appliances; funding public transit as an alternative to fossil fuels; and even looking at some of the agricultural impacts on greenhouse gases as it contributes to the most serious threat, as I think we all recognize, in this generation, which is climate warming.

I want to just say a little bit about the need to change our terms from "climate change" to "climate warming" because the warming is indeed the real issue here. Certainly, there are disruptions and extreme weather events associated with climate, but we need to emphasize that the climate is warming. The warming is causing loss of icefields, the raising of sea levels, causing acidification in our oceans. It's impacting our fish life. Surely, as Albertans we know that we have to do better. Our international reputation is certainly impacting our economy, not to mention, as I mentioned, our social and health indicators and, bottom line, our economy. I am very interested to hear the minister talk about a more holistic approach to planning. We have yet to see the evidence that they are taking a comprehensive look, including the social, environmental, and job costs of continuing on the same path.

Now, in 2012, as the minister rightly says, the federal rules changed, and there was some sense that there was going to be some phase-out, but unfortunately they added five years to the original plan for phase-out, which means another 40 per cent increase in our greenhouse gas emissions and increased health impacts, particularly, can I say, in the Edmonton area because Edmonton is

right downwind from the big Wabamun plants, some of the oldest in the province. Why should we be allowing a company that was supposed to phase out at 45 years to go to 50 years? Because they can, because they can lobby, and because this government is extremely sensitive to lobbying and to the economic bottom line of their donors.

I looked at some of the donations in 2012, Mr. Speaker, and it was something like \$400,000 from the coal companies in Alberta prior to that election. This really was shocking, and it added new incentives for me to speak out on the importance of a comprehensive, full-cost accounting in our energy mix instead of just assuming that because coal is \$50 per kilowatt hour, according to the minister, that included all of the externalities, which, of course, it doesn't. Emergency room visits, asthma, lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease: all of these don't figure into any of these calculations that the minister is giving on the price of a kilowatt hour. Nor does he comment on the very small number of jobs associated with coal-fired power and the four to five times as many jobs that are associated with clean technology and green energy.

There is a real opportunity here to not only talk the talk but walk the walk in terms of putting out all the facts as they are in the literature and to recognize that we are not finding the balance and not accelerating in a way that most of the world can appreciate or respect. We have a serious international reputation problem, and we're losing scores of people every year as a result of our failure to recognize the health impacts.

In my view and in the view of a growing number of Albertans, there are some tremendous new technology opportunities, not the least of which is combined heat and power in association with the oil sands, which could be providing a tremendous addition and an earlier phase-out. I don't know if the minister is aware of the opportunities in the oil sands for combined heat and power, which would double the efficiency, in fact, of our power generation and reduce our greenhouse gases by about 30 per cent.

The minister is busy talking to somebody else, but I hope he will be interested in speaking to the oil sands operators about this tremendous opportunity that simply needs incentives. It needs some financial and other incentives, recognizing that the economic bottom line is not the only bottom line. There are tremendous gains to be made on the triple bottom line if we look at accelerating the phase-out of coal-fired power and taking advantage, obviously, of the transition fuels we have here, natural gas and natural gas liquids.

So the Liberal caucus will certainly be supporting this motion. I'm very grateful for the member raising this real step forward in what many Albertans are anxiously awaiting: a comprehensive plan, a real commitment to moving forward, not just the talk but walking the walk of a comprehensive analysis based on a longer term vision and a plan to include all the externalities, social, economic, and environmental.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I will recognize the Minister of Finance, followed by the Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a proud union coal miner for 30 years I have to rise to speak against this job-killing motion put forward by the NDs. This is not just a study, as the Member for Livingstone-Macleod would suggest. If you read the motion put forward by the member, it is to "urge the government to commit to the immediate study and drafting of a plan to phase out all coal-generated power in Alberta by 2030." So it's not just a study. As a member from rural Alberta I think he would want to

stand up for rural Albertans and make sure that we have positive jobs for them moving forward into the future.

The coal industry has been providing jobs to thousands of Albertans each and every year right across this province. In fact, over 1,800 coal mines have operated in Alberta since the 1800s. In the 1860s coal mining began near what is known now as Lethbridge. The first mine to operate right here in Edmonton was in 1883. Of course, my constituency of West Yellowhead was built on coal through the coal branch south of Hinton and Edson. One of the reasons I came west, Mr. Speaker, as a fourth-generation miner is that I was proud to come and work for Luscar coal company.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009 Alberta produced 31 million tonnes of marketable coal. We have strong environmental regulations already in place for the coal industry. The coal industry's reclamation is world renowned for the work they do. The bighorn sheep, for example, are icons not only in Alberta but right across North America of the work done on reclamation in the coal industry. Existing measures are already in place reducing our reliance on coal. However, it needs to be said that there's enough coal right now for the next 600 years to supply Alberta with the energy they need moving forward, and we could be a leader in clean coal technology if we wanted to be.

This year we estimate that natural gas, including cogeneration, will surpass coal as the largest source of electrical generation in Alberta. In 2013 just half of Alberta's actual electricity generation came from coal. The share of coal has been declining for more than two decades. These mines have always provided opportunities for Albertans and create good-paying jobs and in most cases good-paying union jobs, Mr. Speaker, and that should not be lost on anybody. In fact, the average coal mining wage is more than twice that of the average national wage according to information gathered by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The estimated average salary in 2011 was \$92,785 in the coal industry while the national average salary was \$43,700. Jobs in the coal industry provide families with great sources of income, which helps support our communities, our economy, and provides income taxes to both the provincial and federal coffers.

In addition, coal companies support nonprofit organizations that support our rural communities. For example, in my riding alone the Edson Kinsmen spray park was donated by a coal company. Luscar in Hinton provided the curling rink, worked on the community centre, and provided all kinds of different nonprofit organizations with the money to help them through their process. Also Grande Cache Coal was a prime mover in getting the town of Grande Cache built and all the work that they needed in their rec centre and employing people in that area. Mr. Speaker, there are countless examples of how industry supports our rural towns and villages, whether it's Forestburg, Hanna, Wainwright, or Wabamun. In addition to supporting nonprofit organizations, the industry creates opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs which contribute to our economy.

5:50

Unfortunately, we've seen what can happen if the industry isn't successful. The community of Grande Cache in my constituency of West Yellowhead is one of those examples. It's heavily dependent on the coal industry. The local mine has been struggling as of late and has had to lay off employees, which has devastated the town. Following the layoffs, a number of small businesses have had to close their doors. This not only has an economic impact, but it creates a psychological impact as doors to businesses close and people move away. The community is struggling, and the ND motion would only create an even more dire situation. We need to

do what we can to ensure the industry is viable so communities like Grande Cache can thrive and survive.

Mr. Speaker, with families across this province losing jobs in the oil and gas industry, we must keep Albertans working. Keeping Albertans working is a priority for our government. Unlike the NDs, we are not going to take actions that cost Albertans their jobs. From Coleman to Robb this industry is important to communities across the province. I am firmly against the ND motion today as it would kill jobs and negatively impact communities in my riding, including Jasper. And people say: why Jasper? Because CN has a hub in Jasper, and those employees take coal to the coast from all of the mines in West Yellowhead. Grande Cache, Hinton, Edson, Robb, Brûle: all communities in my riding that depend on the coal industry.

Let's keep Albertans working, and let's support rural Alberta in our economy, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

The hon. Minister of ESRD.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in opposition to this motion for many of the same reasons as outlined by the hon. Minister of Energy and the hon. Minister of Finance. I will say that I think the spirit and the intent of the hon. member with this motion is admirable. However, I think it lacks considerable foresight about some of the consequences of what she is actually proposing.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, is that a lot of the work which the hon. member talked about is already being taken into consideration in a way that accounts for some of the consequences brought forward by the Minister of Energy and by the Minister of Finance. The makeup of our electrical generation from coal to other sources is changing. My colleague the Minister of Energy brought forward the reasons as to why that's happening, so I won't reiterate that, but to quickly summarize these points, there are already federal rules for greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants. About 60 per cent of Alberta's existing coal-fired power plants will be retired by the year 2029. At that time only 10 per cent of the province's electricity generation will be from coal-powered plants.

The world of alternative energy is an important one for this province and for all citizens across the world. It's important to ensure that as we heat our homes, power our devices, and provide the comforts in our home and elsewhere, it is being met through cleaner sources of electricity that are economical for consumers both large and small. Over the next 15 years I'm sure that we are going to see great progress on this front from solar to wind to biomass and other sources.

At the same time Alberta has an electricity emissions management framework in place. This requires significant improvements in emissions performance in coal-fired units as the years go on. This framework allows for the replacement of older, more emission intensive generation with newer, less emission intensive generation as part of Alberta's electrical system. We're currently reviewing our energy and climate change strategy and approach, including but not limited to the electricity system, and we have publicly committed to shifting to a lower emission source of power, which has co-benefits of air quality improvements in these airsheds. While this strategy is not complete or decided, the preliminary direction indicates that we are committed to the existing provincial and federal air quality and greenhouse gas emission requirements to ensure Alberta has a healthy environment.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, the air quality in this province is of a high quality for 96 per cent of the days in the year. This is something that we measure, the ambient air quality, as part of the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Agency. That will be something that we can continue to monitor to make sure that these emission sources don't impact Albertans' health, and as we see the reduction of them over time, we believe that we do have the right plan in place to do exactly what the hon. member is wanting from a health standpoint for Albertans while considering the economic consequences highlighted by the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Finance.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

We may have two minutes left for the Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in the debate on Motion 507 brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Motion 507 calls on Alberta to phase out coal-generation power by 2030. However, I believe the implications embedded within this motion are harmful for a number of reasons. As we know, due to low oil prices Alberta is undergoing difficult economic times that have overreaching effects on a number of sectors. In order to make the best decisions that do not cripple our economy, we should focus on the promotion of fiscal strength and the continued success of our province's industrial sector.

Alberta is well under way in our efforts to reduce coal-powered plants, as we have already heard. We must be more concerned with how this would affect employees working in the industry; namely, the many individuals who rely on coal plants to feed their families. Mr. Speaker, employees who work in our coal industry are hard-working people who believe in the integrity of the jobs they do and the services that millions of Albertans rely on every single day. Motion 507 fails to consider the human aspect of Alberta's coal industry. What Motion 507 also fails to provide is a viable job strategy that should be implemented in order to address those who will be unemployed as a result of coal plant phase-out.

Reducing coal-generated electricity could help to reduce pollution and smog, allowing for the growth of clean and renewable energy. But these changes take time, and these changes should be done in a well-orchestrated and responsible manner. Any good policy requires extensive planning, and Motion 507 fails to realize any viable workforce plan or strategy. Motion 507 would render many Albertans jobless, without any immediate transition.

Mr. Speaker, how does this motion benefit Albertans, especially those relying on coal-generated electricity as a source of energy and as a source of income like many people in my constituency? Frankly, it does not.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I would offer the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona this time.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. I will try to take less time than that. Just a couple of quick points. First of all, on the issue of jobs this was a motion to put in place a plan. A plan would include a strategy to preserve and maintain and promote jobs. I find it incredibly rich that a government that has dedicated its whole being, it's whole existence, to shipping long-term sustainable jobs to Texas would lecture me on jobs. That's ridiculous. Moreover, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that economists will tell you that the multiplier effect on renewable energy is much higher than coal and that, in fact, in the long term there will be more jobs, not fewer.

Let me make it very clear, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP is about creating jobs, not about killing them. I'm very tired of these ridiculous, tired old fearmongering talking points from a bunch of folks that don't want to move forward, because this is about moving forward. This is about making a decision to understand that we're a modern province that needs to take responsibility for the

environmental consequences of our decisions. That's what leadership is, that's what planning is, and that's what good government does. This kind of negligent see no evil, hear no evil, stick our head in the sand kind of approach has not served Albertans well. It didn't serve people living downstream from the dam that wasn't even inspected, and it's not going to serve us going forward.

I'd like to make a couple of points. There was a change in regulations around coal, and as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View rightly pointed out, those changes made the problem worse, not better, and the Minister of Energy knows that. As for the specified gas emitters regulations, that's what the Auditor General said was not working and was not going to get us anywhere because this government is not doing a good job on it. That's why we need to change this.

Let me just finally renew or re-emphasize a point made by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, because I hadn't realized this: \$400,000 in election donations in the last election year from the coal industry. Mr. Speaker, really? We are so far behind the rest of the country, and now I'm starting to see even more why that is. That's why we need a change in government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope people will vote in favour of this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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