



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 22

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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

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Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Hon. Robin, West Yellowhead (PC)
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DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
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Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Saskiw, Shayne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
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Liberal Opposition Whip
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (PC)
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Wilson, Jeff, Calgary-Shaw (PC)
Woo-Paw, Hon. Teresa, Calgary-Northern Hills (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)
Vacant, Battle River-Wainwright
Vacant, Spruce Grove-St. Albert

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.

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Holy Creator, we seek Your guidance in helping us to fulfill the responsibilities that come with public office. Help us to make the best decisions possible, that those decisions in turn may help those whom we are pledged to serve in this Assembly. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We have some visitors who will be introduced shortly, but in the meantime shall we proceed with school groups first? Let us do that, then.

Let us begin with Sherwood Park, followed by Red Deer-North.

Ms Olesen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the students, teachers, and parent volunteers from Woodbridge Farms elementary school. Actually, there are 52 of them, in fact. The teachers are Ms Antonia Triska, Mrs. Carey Cummings, Mr. Tyson Parker, and the parent helpers are Mr. Randy Rosen, Mrs. Karen Dunham, and Mrs. Yvonne Thomas. Located in my constituency of Sherwood Park, Woodbridge Farms is a co-operative community of learners wholeheartedly dedicated to the success of every one of their over 400 students. I would ask that the Woodbridge Farms school group now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has some special visitors.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a friend and passionate Canadian, the Hon. Bob McLeod, the Premier of the Northwest Territories; in addition, an old friend, the Hon. Michael Miltenberger, who is the Northwest Territories' Minister of Environment and Natural Resources; in addition, Mr. Gary Bohnet, the principal secretary and executive officer of the Territories; and Martin Goldney, who is the Territories' Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations.

Premier McLeod and Minister Miltenberger are in our capital city to sign an agreement between Alberta and the Northwest Territories that relates to bilateral water management. The agreement really highlights our commitment to work together to manage our water and our aquatic resources, particularly in the Mackenzie River basin. As we all know and as we've discussed in this Chamber, water is a vital resource, and this agreement will ensure that our governments continue to collaborate to develop water management plans that benefit both our communities and the integrity of our diverse and valuable ecosystems. Alberta and the Northwest Territories have a long history. In fact, there was a time when we were part of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker, as you well know.

On behalf of everyone in the Chamber I would like to say welcome to our esteemed guests, and I would ask the people to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome to all of you.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us proceed with Red Deer-North. You have a school group to introduce?

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 58 students from Gateway Christian school in my constituency of Red Deer-North. These students are among the brightest and the best that Alberta has to offer, and I know that our future is in good hands. They're accompanied by – you can tell they're well loved; they're well supervised – three teachers and their 11 parent helpers. The teachers are Miss Shelley Wiebe, Mrs. de Koning, and Mr. Kooman, and the parent helpers are Mrs. Noble, Mrs. Winczura, Mrs. Trost, Mrs. Demers, Mrs. Karri-Anne Brewster, Mr. Reza Torabi – sorry about the mispronunciation – Mrs. Karen Mullin, Mr. Dean Stutheit, Mr. Christopher Mah, Mrs. Krystal Kromm, and Mr. Jon Wieler. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let us move on to Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly guests from the Turkish-Canadian Society board of trustees, the Edmonton ANZAC Committee, and the military, who are attending today in remembrance of this year's historic 100th anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli, to be commemorated on April 25, 2015. The Gallipoli Campaign took place on the Gallipoli peninsula in the Ottoman Empire, known today as Turkey. The commemorations to be held recognize the bravery, courage, huge loss of life, and sacrifices made by the Allied forces and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, ANZAC.

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and remain standing as I mention their names: Ms Dilara Yegani, chair, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society, whose grandfathers fought in the Battle of Gallipoli and the Turkish independence war; Mrs. Sinem Senol, vice-chair, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mrs. Donna Mae Lewis, secretary, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Dr. Hakan Ozdemir, treasurer, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mrs. Gigi Talibi, auditor, board of trustees, Turkish-Canadian Society; Mr. Bernhard Baker, chair, Edmonton ANZAC Committee, and former member of the New Zealand Defence Force; representing the commemoration of the ANZAC landings, Lieutenant Jason Pascoe, former member of the Australian army reserves and current serving reservist with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and Warrant Officer Matthew Parsons, former member of the New Zealand Defence Force and current serving member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. I would now ask the Assembly to please join me in giving the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this entire Assembly two people here to mark national Dietitians Day. They are Karen Boyd, regional

executive director, Alberta and the Northwest Territories, from Dietitians of Canada, and Doug Cook, registrar of the College of Dietitians of Alberta. March is also Nutrition Month, and these representatives as well as others spent the morning in the rotunda sharing their expertise and educating me and my fellow colleagues on the values that dietitians bring to our health care system. Please join me in recognizing them with the traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Jan Buterman. Jan is a founding member of TESA, the Trans Equality Society of Alberta, and the current president. TESA's mission is to be a witness to and a voice for matters concerning trans Albertans. Jan is active on issues of equality and accessibility. I wanted to invite him here today to thank him for contributing to the debate on Bill 10, advocating for human rights protecting gender identity and gender expression, and rightfully pointing out that LGBTQ human rights are not only an issue of sexual orientation. I would encourage all members of the Assembly to visit TESA's website, tesaonline.org, to learn about the work that still needs to be done in Alberta for trans equality. I'd ask Jan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so thrilled to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four very dedicated and hard-working department staff here today from Municipal Affairs. These individuals I'm introducing represent our legislative projects unit, the MGA Review Team, legislative counsel, and the staff that have been working so very hard on Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. They are in the House today to watch debate on Bill 20 in second reading. I would ask that Brandy Cox, Melinda Steenbergen, Katie Nault, and Eric Martin rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one gentleman seated in the members' gallery. He's a national political consultant with clients in seven provinces and at all levels of government, including many here in Alberta. After four years of working on Parliament Hill, he returned to the private sector to provide political consulting and voter contact services to elected officials, candidates, businesses, municipalities, and advocacy and professional organizations across Canada. This gentleman is the fine-dressed Mr. Jim Ross. I'd ask him to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: We have two minutes per person for these. Let us begin with Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Battle of Gallipoli Centenary

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, in 1915 the shores of Gallipoli in Turkey were the scene of one of the world's most infamous military disasters, a tragedy which epitomized the horrors of the First World War. The narrow Dardanelles Strait, a critical sea route from Europe to Russia controlled by Turkish guns and mines, needed to be secured by British and Allied forces. On March 18, 1915, the main attack by the Allied battleships tried to break through the strait but failed. At dawn on April 25, 1915, the British and the Australian and New Zealand corps, ANZAC, sent ground forces which landed on the shores of Gallipoli. Lack of sufficient intelligence and maps of the contoured terrain along with the trained Turkish soldiers defending the high ground with modern weapons like the machine gun hampered the success of their invasion. After eight months of bitter fighting and heavy battle casualties on both sides, including unsanitary conditions, the campaign ended in failure for the British and ANZAC forces. However, an Ottoman victory resulted, which renewed Turkey's vision for the modern Turkey under the leadership of Commander Atatürk.

The centenary of the Battle of Gallipoli will be remembered and commemorated today and on April 25, 2015, known as ANZAC Day. It is only right that Albertans be encouraged to pause and pay our respects to all the brave soldiers' sacrifice, including the regiment from Newfoundland – extraordinary heroism prevailed and the valour of not only those from the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps but all those who fought and died at the site of the Gallipoli conflict – and also to remember all those who have served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations since that time.

Mr. Speaker, deepest gratitude to the families of the many descendants, who are vigilant to keep alive the memory of their loved ones as they did not return from the battlefield. Rest eternally in peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's take a trip back to 2007. *Spider-Man* was number one at the box office, Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone, the U.S. housing bubble was set to burst, the Ottawa Senators were fighting for a chance at the Stanley Cup, and on Parliament Hill the federal Industry minister and now our Premier was waving the flag for Alberta's proposed royalty review. Alberta's new royalty regime had a superhero in this Premier. He cheered loudly about how the review strikes the right balance for Alberta and our oil industry. Despite dire warnings from industry the minister and now Premier gave this new royalty regime his unconditional support.

Now let's hop to 2010. Alberta's oil and gas industry is devastated by this foolish review, billions of dollars' worth of investment has picked up and walked away, the members opposite are taking down yet another one of their leaders, and a new political entity is born that stands firmly on the side of our energy industry.

I'm not sure why the Premier's memory is so bad. Either way, this Premier would be wise to remember that he was a critical piece in the creation of Alberta's royalty review. He wasn't the culprit, but he was an accomplice. I don't think his memory is improving either. Just months ago he said that he'd consolidate Alberta's budget. He didn't. He said that he'd balance the budget and keep new taxes off the table. Well? He said that he'd stick to Alberta's

fixed-election law. Well, we know that's not going to happen. He's done everything in his power to wipe out democracy and decimate the opposition. We know this Premier has supported increasing royalties once. What makes us so sure he won't let it happen again?

One thing is for sure, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose remains the one and only party standing between this Premier and his foolish plans to devastate this province one more time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Rural Health Services Review

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Minister of Health and I were very pleased to publicly release the final report of the rural health services review. So what's in the report, and more important, what's going to be done about it?

Well, just like every Albertan, rural Albertans expect and deserve high-quality, patient-centred health care. Patient-centred health care means that sometimes sick patients don't travel to healthy doctors; sometimes the healthy doctor travels to the sick patient. As rural Albertans constantly reminded us, the road goes both ways.

Now, the report also talks about the need for a team of health care professionals, not just doctors but nurses, physicians' assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives, pharmacists, dietitians, and paramedics. While we'll continue to need to attract foreign-trained medical and health care workers, we need to do more to grow our own, and it's time that we devoted the same time and effort identifying and nurturing the next generation of healers as we do hockey players.

Now, EMS remains a major concern, and I would like to acknowledge and thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East for his valuable counsel in this critical area. Ambulances need to be used for emergencies, not as taxis, and when a rural crew heads into the city, they need to discharge their patient quickly and head back home. Straight home.

We can and we will make better use of underutilized rural health infrastructure. Just ask the local community leaders and health care providers; they'll tell you how we can breathe life back into rooms that have stood empty and dark for too long. While we're at it, let's ask them for some input into health care planning.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't have to cost more; it can cost less. But it's not about money; it's about care. In medicine you assess the patient, you come up with a diagnosis, and you institute treatment. The rural health review has done that. It is supported by the Premier and the minister. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That last statement would be a lot more compelling if it wasn't all focused on fixing the mistakes of this government.

Health Care Funding

Ms Notley: Now, recently the topic of health care continues to be a major issue for Albertans. We've learned that children and their families are showing up for surgeries at Stollery children's hospital only to discover that their surgery has been cancelled due to overcapacity. We've learned that hospitals in Calgary are so jam packed that they couldn't treat patients in need of dire care 66 times in November alone. We've learned that the government has no problem finding \$2 million for a luxury golf course, yet they can't find \$17,000 to bring elevators at the Sturgeon community hospital

up to safety code or find \$55,000 to buy a lightning rod that the Misericordia needed three years ago. They can't even find \$200,000 that Royal Alex has needed since 2010 for a fire alarm upgrade. It sounds like the PCs need a little help getting their priorities straight.

Today we learned what everybody already knew: that rural Albertans don't have access to the care they need, that small towns across this province have lost their family doctors, that rural Albertans can't rely on EMS services when they need them. The PCs will tell us not to worry, that they've solved the problem once again – nothing to see here – just like they did last year and last decade and the decade before that. Yet the problems still seem to get worse, Mr. Speaker. The PCs have failed to manage Alberta's health care system in the good times. They've failed to invest in crumbling hospitals. They've failed to provide services. They couldn't even fix an elevator, for crying out loud. Now that the price of oil has dropped, now that budgets are tighter, does the Premier really expect Albertans to trust him to fix health care now?

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

Child and Youth Mental Health

Ms Kennedy-Glans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary-Varsity we receive a lot of questions from people supporting a loved one who's suffering from mental illness. To deepen and widen our outreach on these queries, we hosted a town hall in our constituency last month, inviting a panel of local experts to guide us. Our constituency has been a long-standing champion for dementia care, a disease suffered primarily by seniors in our communities. Of course, dementia remains a priority, but what we realized through this recent outreach was the critical need for child, youth, and student mental health research.

1:50

Here are some of the facts. About 50 per cent of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and 90 per cent by the age of 25. Psychiatric illnesses – schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety – are the major chronic diseases of young people. Adolescents with psychiatric illness are at an enormously increased risk of suicide.

The province, our postsecondary institutions, and K to 12 educators have been collaborating to support youth and student mental health services and research, but the historical gap between the need for and the availability of both researchers and clinicians is great. This fact was reinforced this week in meetings with student leaders from CAUS and ASEC.

Research needs to be deepened and widened to all levels of investigation from understanding, for example, how cannabis use affects the brain, through the best strategies to identify youth who are becoming unwell, through health system research to make the services for youth more efficient. While there has been investment and action, many believe this commitment is not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem or with the long-term cost to society of not addressing the problems of mental health in our most valuable resource, Mr. Speaker, our youth.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, you are reminded you have 35 seconds to pose a question, 35 seconds to bring forward a response, and at that point I'll have to cut you off if you exceed that. I hope

the clock is working today. We've had troubles with it for the past few days, but it should be okay today.

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

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: On a day many are calling Bloody Tuesday, about 500 people lost their jobs at Nexen and Talisman Energy. It's the worst possible news for those laid off and their families. I feel for them, Mr. Speaker, and we wish them all well. The question they now face is: how will they manage their family finances with massive tax increases looming on the horizon? Premier, raising taxes on these Albertans is not fair, it's not right, and it's not necessary. Why do you insist on doing that?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the loss of any job is one too many, and we're all saddened by what we're seeing, particularly in the energy economy, with additional job losses announced today. This is something the government is very sensitive to. It speaks to why we need to manage our finances carefully as a province. It speaks to why we need to ensure that we diversify our economy. As a government we will continue to work with any Albertan that has lost their job, to try to get them back into meaningful employment using every method we can. This is of concern to the government and should be to all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. It's clear that the government's priorities are completely out of whack. The CBE, U of A, and AHS have all given their former presidents half-a-million-dollar severances within the last year. On the same day that the Wildrose released information about severances at the AGLC, with one executive receiving a payout worth three times their annual salary, thousands of Albertans find themselves unemployed. Premier, you've refused to take action on severances at agencies, boards, and commissions. What are Albertans to think as they face unemployment and punishing tax hikes?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that this member is receiving a \$627,000 severance herself when she retires from this Chamber. Which way is up?

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Golf courses, golden handshakes, and corporate payouts: these are all PC priorities while Albertans are hurting. Massive severance payouts across hundreds of agencies, boards, and commissions; a bloated bureaucracy; and the most expensive government in Canada: these are the priorities this Premier wants Albertans to pay for with the largest tax increase in Alberta's history just when they're hurting most. Premier, nothing could hurt the economy more than more tax increases. Will you commit to fixing this mess in your own backyard without taxing Albertans?

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, \$627,000 is what this member is receiving as a severance when she retires from here. Perhaps, maybe, she'd like to elaborate on that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition question. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Provincial Elections

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier laughed off questions when asked if the government handing out \$28 million to the Chief Electoral Officer meant that an early, unnecessary, and illegal election is on the horizon. Albertans are losing their jobs, worried about higher taxes and making ends meet. They didn't think that was funny. In the real world Albertans aren't talking about election games or asking their government to break their own law. Premier, can you just stop it with the political games and tell Albertans if you're breaking your own law, and if so, what is the election date?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the week ahead the Minister of Finance will rise in this Chamber, and he will introduce a budget that amounts not just to a budget for the next year but a 10-year fiscal plan for the government of Alberta. This responds to the circumstances that we face as a province. It will be fair. It will be balanced. It will be a measured response to what this province needs in the circumstances that we're in. No one in this Chamber is responsible for the collapse of oil prices and the government revenues, but this government will deal responsibly with these.

Mr. Saskiw: Mr. Speaker, he didn't answer the question. That answer isn't credible. Albertans aren't stupid. They know that \$30 million for the Chief Electoral Officer means an election is coming. Here are the facts. That money could help keep the largest tax increase in Alberta's history off our backs. It could help pay off the debt or support core government services. I'll ask again: Premier, are you breaking your own promise to keep Alberta's fixed election law? Can you stop the games and tell Albertans when the election date will be? Just answer the question, Premier.

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there will of course be an election in due course, but the real question Albertans have relates to the policies of the member opposite and his party, policies such as blocking and stopping the Keystone pipeline, commencing a royalty review, and, most recently, a suggestion that they will, in order to generate revenue for the government, issue some sort of funny bonds that don't have to be repaid. These are the kinds of economic policies that Albertans can expect from the opposition.

Mr. Saskiw: Point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, your point of order has been noted at 1:57 during this last exchange. Let's go on to the last supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that the Premier, when he was running for the leadership of the PC Party, promised free tuition for everyone. There are all sorts of promises that he's made. There's no question there's a cost to democracy, but there's a cost to breaking the law and not keeping your promises. Fixed election laws are designed to be a contract between voters and their government. The PC MLA for Highwood once said that we need fixed election dates so that elections are, and I quote, not held at the convenience of the governing party. End quote. Premier, do you agree with your colleague? If not, can you tell Albertans what the election date will be? Which one is it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We dealt with this in estimates yesterday. I think if you turn to *Hansard*, which is dated

Friday, December 5, 2014, in which the Chief Electoral Officer approached Legislative Offices about his increases for the next fiscal year, he talked about needing new electoral boundaries, he talked about having to put more balloting in place, he talked about the fact that he wanted to look at electronic voting, and he talked about the investigations he has going on. If you look back in the history of this province, it's always been the emphasis of Legislative Offices to look at what the electoral officer has asked for two years in advance.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Investigation into Release of Information

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the PC government was rocked by allegations that a cabinet minister leaked a \$20,000 phone bill from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who was then running against the current Premier for the PC leadership. To make matters worse, a citizen's privacy was allegedly violated through the fraudulent use of his name to send that leaked phone bill to the media. The Premier at the time was so outraged that he ordered an internal investigation into this very serious matter six months ago. Can the Premier update the Assembly on the status of this internal investigation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Campbell: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is very serious, and we take it very seriously. As a matter of fact, the office of the Privacy Commissioner has taken over the investigation. As we know, the office operates independently and will conduct its own investigation, and I'm looking forward to seeing what the results will be when she's finished her investigation.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Service also began its own criminal investigation into alleged violations of the Criminal Code for fraudulent impersonation of a Calgarian's identity in order to leak the phone bill to the media on the day of the PC leadership debate. Shortly after the PC leadership race ended and before any results were made public, the Calgary Police Service shut down the investigation. Another question to the Premier: did the Premier or any member of his government have any discussion with the police about this investigation, and can he tell us why it suddenly went cold?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

2:00

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Matters dealing with law enforcement, of course, operate fully independently of government. I would suggest that this member, if he has any further questions, contact the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, last year the Premier showed he is capable of striking secret deals with his opponents when he convinced the former Leader of the Official Opposition to cross the floor. We've learned his preference is to bring potential political issues into his caucus and out of the public eye. Can the Premier assure Albertans that there was no deal with anyone at Calgary Police Service to make this investigation go away?

Mr. Denis: Again, Mr. Speaker, the same answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, leader of the ND opposition.

Rural Health Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago the Health Quality Council of Alberta reported that constant reorganization of our health care system causes chaos for patients and front-line workers and recommended stability. Hmm. We've had boards, then we had regions, then we had bigger regions, then we had one big region, then we had a central board, then they fired the board, then they had a deputy minister, then a CEO, and now they're hiring the board again, and now they're redcentralizing the government's centralized health care system. My question is to the Premier. Why should anyone trust your government on yet another health care reorganization?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. All we're doing is setting up an organizational structure to allow Alberta Health Services to operate more effectively. This is not as much a reorganization as an operating model which will allow them to operate more effectively, deliver services to rural areas in a more efficient manner, and deal better with the residents of our province.

Ms Notley: Sounds to me like a redisorganization, Mr. Speaker.

Today's report on rural health care makes it clear that health care in rural areas isn't serving the interests of Albertans. It's unacceptable for people to have to drive 600 kilometres for a five-minute consultation. It's unacceptable that people are dying because dialysis is too far away. It's unacceptable that rural communities are losing people and business because they can't keep a family doctor. Again to the Premier: will you admit that your government's original centralization was and is an abject failure for the people of this province?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that in this country many jurisdictions are looking to go to a centralized health care system, but centralization doesn't mean just one particular entity; it means finding a best operating model, which is what we're putting in place. We're trying to make sure we relate to our communities to give them the kinds of health services they all desire, and that's what we'll be doing.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this report outlines hardship and dangerously low or completely absent basic health care services outside of Edmonton and Calgary. Whether it's obstetric care, mental health, dialysis, seniors' care, in almost every way this government has let down rural Alberta. The problem is this: almost every meaningful recommendation in that report costs more money. So how can Albertans trust this government to provide safe health care in a time of fiscal restraint when they neglected and abandoned rural Alberta health care when times were good?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe a new, more decentralized system will allow it to be a better system, less costly, with greater care. We think the new system we're putting in place will give Albertans a better opportunity to have access to care, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The majority of scientists around the world are in broad agreement about the occurrences, causes, and consequences of climate change. Supposedly AEMERA, Alberta's environmental monitoring service, is created on this foundation of broad scientific agreement, yet on Monday the Minister of Finance stood in this Assembly and defended the burning of coal and justified greenhouse gas emissions. To the Premier: do you accept the scientific majority findings that the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere poses the greatest risk of irreversible climate change?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take climate change very seriously in this province, and the work that is done by AEMERA, with the arm's-length agency, is very important work for us, and that is why we implemented that arm's-length environmental monitoring agency. I can tell you that we've worked with the federal government on our coal regulations, and as we work to phase out the coal regulations and bring more cleaner energy into the province, that's very important. The minister spoke about that, and he spoke about the phase-out of coal.

Mr. Anglin: Yeah. But you took 11 climate change deniers. I needed to know.

Given that this government claimed credit for reducing greenhouse gases by 146,000 tonnes from a Bonavista gas plant in 2012 and given that this same gas plant's records reveal that it only produces 50,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually, how can this government claim to save 146,000 tonnes when there are only 50,000 tonnes to begin with? Is somebody falsifying documents?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a great deal of examples on the climate change file where we've met our commitments. We set targets in 2010, and we've met those. We're working on our renewed climate change strategy, and we will make sure that we have that shortly. This government, this Premier take very deep concerns with regard to the work we're doing with climate change, and we will continue to move that file forward.

Mr. Anglin: Boy, do we gotta get back to basic math.

Given the reputable audit firm of KPMG has failed greenhouse gas reduction projects because there is no verifiable proof of any reduction and given the Minister of ESRD has overruled more than one KPMG audit without explanation and taken credit for reductions, how can the international markets have any confidence in Alberta's carbon offset system when it appears that the ministry is just fabricating our greenhouse gas reduction numbers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have 34 offset protocols with ESRD with the climate change strategy. We're seeing reductions on the targets that we set. We're meeting those reductions. We have a number of ways that you can pay into a fund. You can use offset credits. This government is working very hard on the climate change file, and we will continue to move that file forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's curtail our preambles from this point onward when it comes to supplementary questions. Let's start with Calgary-Mountain View, and then Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Investigation into Release of Information

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner also launched her own investigation into Service Alberta about how the release of the \$20,000 phone bill of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs may have violated the FOIP Act. Conveniently, the minister who was then responsible for Service Alberta was also the Premier's leadership co-chair. He was also the person the media reported was allegedly involved in shopping the same phone bill to opposition parties. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can the minister update the Assembly on the status of the Privacy Commissioner's investigation into his ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. The office of the Privacy Commissioner is an independent office. They are currently investigating this case. I've spoken with the commissioner and given her the assurance that she has our full co-operation in this case.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can he tell us if he's had any discussion with the Privacy Commissioner about this investigation, or has this case gone cold, too?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. I would suggest that members opposite and all members in this House respect the autonomy of institutions like independent officers of the Legislative Assembly, institutions like our police services, respect their autonomy, allow them to do their job. That's what we believe in here, the rule of law.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think there's a real danger here that Albertans won't get to see the results of any of these investigations before the next election. Will the Minister of Service Alberta commit to a public disclosure of all information about this investigation before the election?

Mr. Khan: Again, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. I'll remind the hon. member that the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is an independent office. I believe it would be inappropriate for me to influence the investigation. We'll co-operate, as I said, with the investigation, but the timeline is in her hands.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Rural Health Services Review

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the rural health report was released, and I'm so happy to hear that the recommendations will improve health care in rural Alberta. The report contains recommendations that Alberta Health Services be split into eight to 10 organizational districts. Although these districts seem like a good idea, I have some concerns with their implementation. To the Minister of Health: with the recommendations of implementing new organizational districts, is the Minister of Health admitting that the centralization of health services in Alberta isn't working and that we are returning to regions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, and thanks for the question. Absolutely not. We are keeping a centralized system, but the operating model of that will be the nine districts, eight districts, 10 districts as they go through the system of evaluating what we need to do. I can assure the member that we'll be able to do more and better service at the local level under the system. Alberta Health Services is committed to making sure this works and delegating the kind of authority to the districts to make the system very effective.

2:10

Mrs. Leskiw: Given that we have gone through organizational changes in the past, can the Minister of Health confirm that these districts will have real authority, or is it just another letterhead exercise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whoa, letterhead exercise. Anyway, yes. Alberta Health Services will be delegating budgets. They'll be setting up facilities' plans. They'll be having the patient-first model. They'll be setting up their advisory councils. This will all be done at the district level under the supervision of Alberta Health Services. This will be meaningful delivery of service, and responsibility and accountability by these districts for this service will be done in a very efficient manner.

Mrs. Leskiw: Given that, ultimately, this review needs to benefit Albertans, how can the minister be sure that the recommendation in this report will actually have a positive impact on patient care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're taking steps. We're putting new operating districts in place, the new EMS delivery model system, new local advisory committees, limiting the time that EMS vehicles can spend when they're in urban areas, and enhancing mental health services by expanding telephone programs. I can assure the member that we will be more effectively delivering health care in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Little-Bow.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the last set of questions, by the way. Ever since this PC government tried centralizing health care seven years ago, our rural health care system has been struggling to provide timely, quality care for Albertans, as we've known. Now this government is finally recommending 10 operational districts to improve regional access. So to the minister: that being the case, how exactly and precisely

with today's announcement will you change the authority and centralization of powers that still exist in AHS?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said before, this will be a delegation of authority to these districts as an operating model. They will be able to implement different programs. They will set up facility programs, modelling for their advisory councils, et cetera. This will be a very effective model, which we believe will help encourage better health delivery in rural Alberta, and we hope to have it operational by July 1.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker. To the minister. This rural health care review recommends relaunching AHS but this time with standards and expectations, I understand. I know the numbers are bad, but do standards and expectations really not exist under your government's current framework? Really? Precisely which ones are going to be addressed as the very first, immediate priorities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a delegation of authority. This is an operating model. Standards will be across the board the highest in Canada. Alberta Health Services will ensure that all Albertans will get the best health care possible in this country.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. With respect to rural EMS we've been raising these issues for two years to see meaningful changes in ambulances. Now that the government has again admitted that we need to address transportation issues in the ambulance system, how exactly and precisely are you going to implement changes, at what cost, and when exactly will we see these overdue nonemergency transfer units in place that I've been talking about for two years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be putting in place protocols to make sure that ambulances coming out of rural Alberta that go into major urban centres with particular patients will be able to off-load their patients and then go back to their communities as soon as possible. We'll also be putting in place programs in which local areas can begin to move people through nonambulance facilities in order to make them move smoother, so not using up our paramedics and ambulances for that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Little Bow, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years rural Alberta has voiced their concern with ambulance services. Many Albertans feel centralized on the dispatch of the ambulance service to our local rural areas. The undue stress to our health care providers, our hospitals: our rural Albertans have had enough of it. With today's release of the rural health care report, I feel it's time to ask the minister some of the same questions that he's been asked already.

One of the issues facing emergency medical services is that ambulances are being used to shuttle nonemergency patients. How is the minister going to end this absurd practice from happening for the emergency personnel in emergency situations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this specific situation Alberta Health Services is increasing its ability to use nonambulance transfer vehicles such as wheelchair-equipped vans for basic transfers that don't require heavily trained paramedics, to help free up rural ambulances for emergency response. When the rural health group went out and talked to Albertans, they were concerned about their ability to control their ambulance service. We need to work with people in rural Alberta to make sure that they feel comfortable with what we're doing, and we will do that.

Mr. Donovan: To the same minister: given that we have a limited number of ambulances and staff and that their time is best spent responding and delivering patients to hospital yet they're stuck in emergency rooms for up to hours waiting for their patients to be admitted, how is this minister going to make sure emergency personnel are back in the field, where they belong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be putting protocols in place to ensure that once an ambulance goes into an urban area, it must return as soon as possible to its home base. This will make sure that there's safety and security in the rural community.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member has one final supplemental.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural ambulances belong in rural areas yet when they finish a call in major centres such as Edmonton, they're tasked to do shuttling services around the city instead of returning to their base, what is this minister doing to make sure that ambulances return to the communities where they're needed the most?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will put in place, again, a protocol to ensure that once the ambulances come into the cities, whether it's Edmonton or Calgary or Red Deer, they will have to return immediately to their communities. They will not be allowed to be reassigned to local duties. They have to be able to support their own communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Leduc-Beaumont.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health can't seem to get his story straight. First he told the Assembly that he's not going to make vaccines in schools mandatory. Then he said that he needs to consult with someone about them somewhere at some time. The government also uses the excuse that mandatory vaccines infringe on the rights of parents and school boards. To the Minister of Health: are you saying no to mandatory vaccinations, or are you still consulting? Which is it?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, across our province we have a program in place to encourage families to vaccinate their children, and my

personal belief is that people should vaccinate their children. We have not mandated that, and we will have to evaluate whether that should be done or not.

Dr. Swann: Given that almost every health expert, doctor, and even his own ministry agree that vaccines save lives, who exactly does the Minister of Health need to consult with before taking the necessary next steps to protect the health and safety of schoolchildren?

Mr. Mandel: Maybe Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that last week this government proved that parental and school board rights do not trump the safety and protection of our children – that's the GSA bill you just passed – does the Minister of Health not see that his own government has already debunked this consultation argument when it comes to GSAs? So why is he still using it? To protect the health and safety of children requires this in potentially life-threatening situations.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, we've had information come in to us that there are jurisdictions that make it mandatory, but their coverage and their vaccination, immunization is much lower than ours. So there are different ways we can look at it and different ways in which we can ensure that our communities, our children are safe. It isn't as simple as the hon. member would like to think.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Food Processing Development Centre

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With an uncertain resource-based economy Alberta has been diversifying for decades and in 1984 opened the Food Processing Development Centre in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, the only facility of its kind in Canada. The food and beverage industry is now Alberta's largest secondary manufacturer, generating in excess of \$10 billion in annual shipments. My question is to the newly minted associate minister of agriculture. For his maiden question: what is the government doing to support and leverage state-of-the-art facilities like the Food Processing Development Centre to help grow our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. The development centre that we have in Leduc is an extremely exciting centre that does culinary work all over Alberta. In fact, six development associations have graduated already and invested \$50 million in capital across Alberta.

2:20

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one final supplemental for that same minister. Mr. Minister, with the current revenue shortfalls are you planning any initiatives in the near term to use this facility to boost value-added opportunities for Alberta's agricultural sector and, by extension, contribute to Alberta's economic future?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. McDonald: Thank you, again. Well, obviously, this facility has been expanded twice already, in 2002 and again in 2007. It's already 140,000 square feet. We're always looking for opportunities, we're always looking for ideas, and we welcome all comers.

Thank you.

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

Deaths of Children in Care

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Premier said that the death of every child in care or receiving services is investigated. We know that that is simply not true. For example, a one-page coroner report with a signature is not a proper investigation into the death of a child. To the Minister of Human Services: will the minister admit that the Premier misspoke and that this PC government is in fact not investigating the deaths of all children in care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The death of a child in care is one too many. Every critical incident, as I said the other day, or death is examined internally and externally depending on the situation, internally through the department as well as externally through the good work of the Child and Youth Advocate, the council of quality assurance, the Family Violence Death Review Committee, the medical examiner, and the fatality inquiry when necessary. [interjection]

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that a round-table concluded last January that investigations into children's deaths in care should be standardized and that more than a year later we still see no progress on this, to the Minister of Human Services again: why does this minister not take the obvious solution to this problem, which is to fund the office of the Child and Youth Advocate properly and allow them to investigate the deaths of children in care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the investigations the Child and Youth Advocate does with his staff – he does excellent work as well. He does have the capacity to do that and, of course, work with Human Services to make those investigations. [interjections] At the end of the day for me, if we lived in a perfect world, there'd be no children in care, no children hurt, no accidental deaths or medical deaths. It's up to the Ministry of Human Services to ensure those deaths are looked into, and we will continue to be transparent.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, do your best to yield the floor to whoever has been given it.

Let's hear your final question.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has laid down so many layers of bureaucracy in Human Services that both the minister and the Premier can't even get their story straight on what constitutes an actual investigation into the death of a child, to the minister again: why doesn't this PC government stop the empty rhetoric, reverse their nonsensical cuts to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and let the professionals do the job of helping children at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that the work of the oversight committee, led by Tim Richter, and the good work that he has done, including all the other work that goes on in Human Services – all of this work is continuing. All children who die in care will be investigated. Again, it goes back to: if we lived in a perfect world. We wish these things wouldn't happen, but they are going to happen. At Human Services we will continue to investigate and be transparent and open in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Medicine Hat Addiction Treatment Facility

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency the Medicine Hat detoxification and residential treatment centre is an innovative facility that is being built to serve all residents through southeastern Alberta. It is unlike any other detox centre available to these Albertans and will offer an aftercare program to each of its patients. My constituents have expressed concern that due to government budget pressures this facility may not open as scheduled. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Given the current fiscal pressures can you confirm that this centre will be built as originally planned?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question. Addiction is a very serious issue in our society. I can confirm to the member that that is a project that is going ahead. The construction has actually commenced. It's a very important project for his particular region, and we intend to ensure that it is completed.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given every detox centre requires highly trained professionals in order to properly run their programs, does the Minister of Health plan on replacing the necessary qualified staff with less-experienced staff so that AHS doesn't have to pay them as much?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no plans to reduce recovery services at the detox facility. The detox facility fills an important need in Medicine Hat, and its services are critical for helping people recover from drug and alcohol addictions. You know, staff continue to care for patients in a temporary eight-bed facility. We'll continue to do that after the 18-bed facility opens this year. Once the permanent facility opens, existing staff will move over, and we anticipate the number of staff will have to be increased as well with the increase in the size of the facility.

I'd also like to recognize the member for his community's great efforts on homelessness.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for recognizing their awesome work.

Again to the Minister of Health: in planning for this new, permanent facility, will there be any cuts to the original number of staff members with the aftercare program, which would undermine this innovative facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary detox facility has six detox beds and two additional beds for people attending the day treatment program in Medicine Hat. The facility is currently staffed with two supervisors, six nursing staff, four addictions counsellors, eight client-care assistants, and one recreational therapist. Once a permanent recovery centre opens in Medicine Hat later this year, it will continue to offer the existing eight beds, and it will add 10 more beds for residential treatment. Again, we expect an increased number of staff working at the facility and existing staff to remain employed. Additional staff will be brought in to work in this facility. This is a very important addition to this community.

We thank the member for his question.

Early Childhood Development

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, late last year we learned that this PC government cancelled the five-year, \$16 million early childhood mapping project, which provided vital data about the development of our children. The project's final report shows some stunning results. Less than half of the 70,000 kids included in the study are developing appropriately physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. To the Minister of Human Services: how can Alberta have a bright future when your government is so clearly failing the children of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate that the Premier has given me focuses on early childhood development. The early childhood mapping project is incredibly important information. That's why it was continued until December 2015. It's important to note that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health are currently working on this together, and we will continue to work in the area of early childhood development.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, given that the ECD mapping project helped to pinpoint the areas where Alberta's kids have the highest needs and given that these studies estimate that for every dollar spent on early childhood education and development programs, \$8 is returned to individuals and to society later in life, will the Minister of Human Services commit to increasing investment in early childhood development, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the hon. member agrees with me on how important early childhood development is in helping our children. We need to get to the root cause. We need to help children. We know that there's great work going on with the Norlien Foundation with brain development. My concern is getting at children from zero to 5, before they get to kindergarten, so we can help them get out of poverty, have proper nutrition, and give family supports when they're needed at home.

Mr. Bilous: My concern is your lack of answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that the ECD mapping project paints a particularly troubling picture for children who are in underprivileged socioeconomic environments and given that the childhood poverty rate has barely changed in the last 25 years in this province, with almost 150,000 kids living in poverty, to the same minister: why won't this government make good on the 2012 promise to end child poverty that you were elected on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It might be perceived as a lack of a question.

I think it's important to note the good work of the seven cities across Alberta, the good work we're doing with Mayor Iveson on the task to end poverty, that I've been privileged to be able to be a part of. Ending poverty is a work for all of us. We also want to support families with the primary care networks, that are now open in the evenings so that families can get medical attention they need. There are a whole number of areas, including parent link centres, including all of the supports that we provide for families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

2:30

Home-care Services

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I have been contacted by several constituents of my riding of Calgary-East who depend on assistance from home care and Alberta aids to daily living or self-managed care. However, they are concerned with the rising costs of their care and have heard that in Edmonton these services are fully funded. To the hon. Minister of Health: is there an explanation for these perceived funding differences between Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that funding levels are set in Edmonton and Calgary and all regions of the province. Putting clients first is always our priority. AADL is funded the same across the province, though the cost to individuals can vary depending on the individual's circumstances. For example, low-income Albertans and those receiving AISH or income support are not required to share the cost of equipment and supplies provided by AADL. There are some differences for home care and self-managed care between Edmonton and Calgary that AHS is working to standardize.

The Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: also, Mr. Minister, I have heard from constituents who suggest that the hourly wage for AHS health care workers is higher in Edmonton than in Calgary. Can you explain these perceived wage differences?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I again want to assure this member and his constituents that the rate paid by AHS for contracted home-care services is exactly the same in Edmonton and Calgary. AHS oversees contract providers to ensure that safe, quality health care is provided but does not determine wages for individual staff members. Alberta Health Services' home-care worker pay follows collective agreements, and the pay scales are identical in both cities. The way in which home-care clients are assessed in Edmonton and Calgary is very similar, though there are some differences that AHS is working to standardize.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the same minister: in regard to self-managed care funding, how are funding needs assessed by Alberta Health Services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS uses an internationally recognized assessment tool to develop an individualized care plan

for clients accessing home-care programs, including self-managed care. This care plan helps AHS to determine the funding for all home-care clients, including those eligible for self-managed care. Self-managed care rates are comparable between both cities, with Edmonton's set only 3.5 per cent higher than Calgary's. This is an historical difference between the two cities and is a small difference when we look at the actual funding numbers. We understand that some families or individuals who depend on self-managed . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Let's move on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by Lethbridge-West.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal caucus has been meeting with postsecondary students, and they have confirmed our suspicions. Because of this government's chronic underfunding of our institutions, they've been forced to invent new ways to fund what the government doesn't, all this while Alberta has the lowest postsecondary participation rate in the country because we fund the lowest number of seats. Does the Premier believe that having the fewest postsecondary graduates in the country sets the province up for a knowledge-based economy?

Mr. Dirks: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we, of course, need skilled workers in Alberta, and our government has no intention of slowing much-needed training, apprenticeship training in particular, in Alberta. We're just going to continue to ensure that we are providing the kinds of services to apprenticeship training applicants, providing our province with skilled workers. That's why we make every effort to ensure that opportunities are available at our technical training and postsecondary institutions to address the very issue the member opposite has just raised.

Ms Blakeman: The minister cannot seriously be trying to tell me that increasing and supporting opportunities for trades apprenticeship and skilled workers is answering my questions about postsecondary education that leads to a creative economy. Are you seriously expecting me to believe that?

Mr. Dirks: Goodness me, Mr. Speaker. If anybody thinks that apprentices are not important in our province and they don't contribute to a knowledge economy, I'm shocked. All postsecondary training is important in Alberta. University training, college training, apprenticeship training in our trades institutions: we support all of that. We believe that's very important to the future of our province. We want to see it continue.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've sent in your point of order at 2:35, during that last exchange. It has been noted.

Ms Blakeman: You didn't answer my question, and you know it.

Back to the Premier again. Since costs to students in postsecondary keep increasing through new approvals for market modifiers and enabling random noninstructional fees, whatever those are, does the government recognize that the tuition cap is effectively gone? There's only one pocket, and it's the student's, and you keep taking out of it.

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member opposite for her question, Mr. Speaker. There are no imminent changes to tuition. Our goal isn't to have the cheapest education; it's to have the best education. Alberta provides one of the highest levels of support to postsecondary institutions. We obtain almost 50 per cent of operating revenue for

these institutions from government funding. This is 5 per cent higher than the national average, 16 per cent higher than Ontario. Tuition from Alberta university students accounts for a lower proportion of operating revenues, 30 per cent, than other provinces such as Ontario and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's move on now to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Seniors' Guaranteed Disposable Income

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are currently 11,000 Albertans who receive the Alberta seniors' benefit and live in publicly funded designated supportive living and long-term care residences. Last year this government made a commitment to those seniors to increase the guaranteed disposable income benefit to \$315 a month. This means that low-income seniors living in care facilities are guaranteed \$315 a month over the cost of housing, food, medical care, and other supplemented costs. I believe our seniors deserve nothing less. My question is to the Minister of Seniors. Has our government implemented the decision this body agreed upon to ensure that all seniors in care can keep \$315 a month?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I thank the member for the question and thank him for the great work that he's done for seniors in his previous role as Minister of Municipal Affairs. I know he did a lot of work on this file in particular. In July 2014 the social housing accommodation regulation was amended to stipulate that all seniors lodge residents must be left with a minimal disposable income of \$315. I can confirm for the member that we have followed through on this promise because we're committed to ensuring that seniors are supported appropriately.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any circumstances in government-subsidized facilities where seniors will not be left with \$315 a month?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, this benefit is designed to ensure that seniors lodge residents have a minimum monthly disposable income. There should not be any circumstances where seniors are left with smaller amounts. If there are cases where this requirement is not being followed, my department would be happy to look into those.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can any of these facilities request that seniors sign waivers so that they are not left with the \$315?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to confirm for the member that the Alberta Housing Act stipulates that each senior resident must be left with a monthly disposable income of at least \$315. As such, any waivers requesting that seniors be left with a smaller amount would not be valid. The legislation would supersede any waivers that would be put in front of them. If there are any cases where this is happening, I'd like to know about it. As I said, my department will assist the housing management bodies and look into this if they're having any difficulty administering the program appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serious allegations are swirling about the board of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. The old minister appointed public members to this board. Dozens of Albertans applied, but two of the minister's old law school buddies and one long-time political volunteer made it through. To the minister: do you really think that filling it up with PC insiders is the way to make this board work?

Mr. Khan: I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question and for his efforts to increase the awareness of consumer protection that Service Alberta performs for Albertans every day. The AMVIC board is comprised of industry stakeholders, as he says. It's also comprised of public members. I think it's completely unfair that the hon. member is taking shots at good, hard-working Albertans . . .

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

Mr. Khan: . . . who perform a good service for Albertans. I believe it's really unfair, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier committed to merit-based appointments on boards like this. He said, "Political party affiliation is not a relevant consideration." To the minister: what are you going to do about this board, that is filled with friends of the PCs and is damaging the trust and integrity of the motor vehicle industry?

2:40

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I've met with the AMVIC board just recently. I want to assure this House that the board is filled with Albertans who are dedicating their time and their energy to performing this service on behalf of consumers and on behalf of the Department of Service Alberta. If this hon. member has a specific issue with a person, I think he should have the courage to mention that.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's not personal; it's about Albertans. Considering this minister refuses to release a report into what really happened at AMVIC, I'm left to wonder why the reasons for the delay relating to the relationships of board members. Will you do the right thing, quit the stalling, and release this overdue report immediately?

Mr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, the member across the aisle refers to a draft report of some issues that we've identified from Service Alberta, from the department, in our efforts to support AMVIC in doing their job, in performing consumer protection for Albertans. This is a draft review. We've talked to the board. We'd like to give the board an opportunity to respond to us. It is my intention to make that draft review public.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we do have another question here. Let's go to Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this morning's announcement of oil at \$42 a barrel and of the dollar slipping, I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance can answer: does this slip in

the dollar and the slip in oil match our revenues, or are we going to be short again?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're down to \$42.27 a barrel, and the Canadian dollar is down around 77 cents. While the low Canadian dollar helps us, it doesn't make up for the fact that oil is trading as low as it is. It is going to cause us some grief in our budget coming forward on March 26.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the Minister of Energy: now, today with this announcement and the differential that we're having with the price of a barrel of oil, what are you expecting to do in the budget? Is this going to cause you some grief as well?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Finance pointed out, we're headed for challenging times indeed. At \$42 oil we are seeing an additional discount against west Texas intermediate – that will be \$12 or \$13 today – and even west Texas intermediate is discounted off the world price. We are cushioned somewhat by the low dollar but not anywhere near sufficiently. Absolutely, we have challenging times ahead in all of our budgets.

Mr. VanderBurg: Access to tidewater has been an issue for all of us in Alberta and in our industry. Could the Minister of Energy tell us if we're any closer to getting a pipeline to the east coast, to the west coast, to the north coast, to the south coast? Where are we?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Oberle: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the member that we're working very diligently on market access. It is the number one item in my mandate letter. He'll know, as all members do, what the situation is with the Keystone XL and the President's insistence on letting the process go all the way through. We are making great progress on Energy East in talks with Ontario and Quebec and in addressing their concerns there, and we are making progress on talks to access the west coast. It is my number one mandate item. I've got a lot of people working on it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, what an interesting day: 112 questions and responses today. Congratulations. That was well done.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order at 2:39, during the exchange between the Minister of Service Alberta and the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, has been noted.

Thirty seconds from now we shall continue with the final member's statement, and we'll hear from Chestermere-Rocky View.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us hear a member's statement for two minutes from Chestermere-Rocky View.

Chestermere High School Basketball

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to applaud the unprecedented success achieved by the basketball teams at Chestermere high school in the riding of Chestermere-Rocky View. This has been a remarkable year of accomplishments. It really has, and I'll lay it out for you.

The school has four teams, junior boys and girls and senior boys and girls. All four of these teams going into the zone finals tournament ranked number 1 or number 2, the top of the heat, Mr. Speaker. After all was said and done, the junior girls won the zone tournament. There are no provincials for them. If there were, I'm sure they would chase that title down. The junior boys did lose a heartbreaker in the first game of their tournament, but they went on to rebound and win the consolation bracket.

The senior girls and senior boys both played in the zone finals; the boys taking gold, the girls taking silver. Both of these teams, though, are off to provincials this weekend. The boys will be in Fort McMurray. The girls will be playing in Taber. Now, the senior boys' team has been undefeated all year. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this streak extends back to November of 2013, made all the more impressive by the fact that their two star players were hurt for a third of the season, and they still succeeded.

All of these teams have demonstrated the tradition of success at Chestermere high school. Excellence is an expectation at this school. By setting the bar high and putting in the hard work, these four teams continue the tradition of success at Chestermere high. I wish both these teams the best of luck at provincials on the weekend, and I applaud their athletic director, Brian Utley, along with their coaches. There are four of them: Rob Wilson, Erhayat Ozcan, Dan Isbister, and Howie Leong. They have done a tremendous job with this group of kids.

To my colleagues in the Legislature as well I'd like to say: should your teams be playing the Chestermere Lakers at provincials or at any other time, buckle up your chinstraps because we're bringing our A game, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. You have a petition?

Ms L. Johnson: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition with over 1,100 signatures. This petition was organized by the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils. The petitioners are urging the government to consider increased funding for public education.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I understand you have a bill that wish to present. I invite you to do so.

Bill 208

Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Saskiw: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege to rise today and introduce my last bill as an MLA. As an opposition member this is the only way which I can introduce legislation that is important to my constituents, and it is an indictment of this PC government that they have limited debate in this House so much that it is unlikely this bill will even come close to second reading.

This bill, the Alberta Human Rights (Commission Accountability) Amendment Act, 2015, seeks to restore and protect the right to free speech that all Canadians enjoy. It seeks to hold the Human Rights Commission accountable and put an end to frivolous and vexatious

claims that unfairly target people for their personal beliefs. For example, my constituents believe that their priests should be able to teach freely from the Bible in church on Sundays. They also believe that you are free not to go to church if you don't want to. My constituents believe that everyone has the right to be offended, to voice their opinion, to proudly share their values, and that they should have these rights without the fear of government prosecuting them.

We will never have a society that agrees on everything. This bill recognizes that we are not all going to agree all the time on every issue, and that's a good thing. This bill recognizes that we as Albertans should be able to have free, open, and fair debate in our communities without the fear of persecution or prosecution.

I urge all members to support this bill, and when I am no longer in this House, I urge all members to fight for the freedoms Albertans deserve: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of conscience.

In closing, I would like to remind all members of our provincial motto, Strong and Free. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail sent to me by a constituent to raise awareness for Worldwide EndoMarch 2015. March is Endometriosis Awareness Month. Endometriosis affects more patients than asthma, diabetes, and breast cancer combined. We are trying to raise awareness here with EndoMarch and trying to attain nonprofit status for this group and to raise money to assist women who are afflicted with this disease.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a letter on an article which I referred to yesterday during debates as required. It is an article called Wildrose Leadership Candidates Face Off in Telephone Town Hall, March 16, by James Wood of the *Calgary Herald*. It refers to, among other things, someone who is standing for leadership of that caucus, Linda Osinchuk, who . . .

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

Mr. Denis: . . . would like to go forward with opposing the Keystone pipeline and also thinks that it's time that we look at the royalty formula. I'll table five copies with the page.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has raised a point of order at 2:51:30 in response to and during, I assume, the tabling that was being given by the Government House Leader. We'll hear about that shortly.

Let's move on to Edmonton-Centre on behalf of Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've had a number of these sent back, and I apologize. I haven't been tabling these very well on behalf of my colleague the leader of the third party opposition. So here we go.

These all pertain to the questions that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was asking today. There are copies of articles by the *Edmonton Sun*. The Premier is concerned about the leak of one of our member's roaming bills. Also from the *Edmonton Sun*: Calgary police investigating impersonation following leaked Alberta Tory documents; Alberta PC leadership candidate for Castle Downs racked up bills over cabinet minister's personal dispute; former Service Alberta minister – I'm at a loss here; I'm sorry; that will get filled in; I don't want to say his name in the House – told opposition parties to FOIP the Member for Castle Downs' expenses; staff members say Alberta Liberal leader, the member for Meadowlark, questioned over Castle Downs' wireless leak; opposition want Alberta's Privacy Commissioner called in after the phone leak; Alberta's Privacy Commissioner looking into the leaked phone bill; and, Mr. Speaker, PCs facing questions of fairness after the previous chief of police for the city of Calgary is appointed as the Calgary-Cross nominee.

Did I get through that with all the right names? If you just give me one second, I'll get the name that I was missing. That would be the Minister of Infrastructure, the Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. You have a tabling?

Dr. Starke: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It's my pleasure today to file the requisite number of copies of the final report of the rural health services review. This effort came about, really, as a result of a team effort, and I do need to thank a number of people. I'd like to, first of all, thank the Premier and the Health minister for giving me this task although there was the odd time where I wasn't quite so thankful. I'd also like to especially give thanks to the six committee members that I was blessed to work with. These are outstanding individuals, very, very dedicated in their own capacities both as nurses, doctors, and health care advocates for rural Alberta. As I said in my member's statement, I'd like to thank my colleague the Member for Calgary-South East. With his experience as a paramedic the advice he gave me on the EMS section of this was invaluable. I'd especially like to thank all rural Albertans that came and met with the committee. Their passion and their caring for the community was palpable, and we appreciated it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let us move on to points of order. I believe we have four points of order or clarification, whatever the case might be today. Let us begin.

There was a point of order raised at approximately 1:57 during the exchange between Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and one of the ministers. Let's hear the point of order, please, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order

Referring to Party Matters

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it was with respect to a comment made by the Premier regarding royalty review changes and so forth. It provides the opportunity, I think, most of all, to provide a clarification. I guess I should go back to an article that was written on October 30, 2007, which states that the federal Industry minister, the current Premier, "threw [his] support behind Alberta's controversial new oil royalty regime Tuesday, giving Premier Ed Stelmach a much-needed political boost." It goes on to say: "Speaking to reporters in Washington, [the current Premier] said he

believes the Alberta government struck 'the right balance' by sharply raising the province's take of oil revenues."

It's odd, Mr. Speaker, that he's criticizing it now when you consider his straightforward support of it. Actually, I'll quote from him. "I think that the premier" – this is referring to Premier Ed Stelmach at the time – "and his government have worked to strike the right balance in the interests of Albertans as the owner of the resource." The quote goes on. "I know it's been a challenge and a difficult process to arrive at that balance, but I think they have" – get this – "succeeded in doing that." This is in regard to Stelmach's proposed royalty increases.

It goes on to say that the Calgary MP at that time "dismissed as alarmist warnings by some critics that Stelmach's move would bring an end to Alberta's long-running economic boom." He said that by increasing the royalties at the time, Alberta would continue to prosper and do very well.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point that out, that the Premier is talking about, first off, that the problem is party matters, and he's complaining about some proposed royalty increases, but his comments here are crystal clear. Back in 2007 he fully supported Premier Ed Stelmach's royalty increases. It's plain as record. Maybe that was then. It's now, now, or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that there was a warning yesterday provided to the government that they should not be speaking about party matters. You gave them the warning, yet they continued and persisted in talking about it. So if you're going to give warnings and they don't do anything about it, maybe you should do something about it right now and ask that they retract that statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect, I'm not prepared to withdraw that statement on behalf of the Premier. I know, first off, that my colleague opposite from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills failed to mention any citation in the standing orders or any other of the constating documents of this Chamber. I again state that the document that I have tabled here is exactly what the Premier was referring to, that a leadership candidate for this party, Linda Osinchuk, talked about raising royalties. She talked about how she was against the Keystone pipeline. These are facts. These may be inconvenient truths to this member, but again there simply is no point of order here.

The Speaker: Anyone else on this point?

Mr. Mason: Why not, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, please be brief.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I note that there was no citation as well. I think that it's quite reasonable to put forward information with respect to the position of a leadership candidate in a leadership race. I think that the matter of the royalties under Premier Stelmach has been mischaracterized by the Wildrose. The current slump in world oil prices has nothing to do with the royalty regime that was put in place under Mr. Stelmach unless he's suggesting that Mr. Stelmach sits around the cabinet table in Saudi Arabia. Otherwise, I would suggest that it has absolutely nothing to do with the current drop in oil prices.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I'm looking at the Blues that have been provided here, and if I have the right spot, I'm going to reference it in a moment, then make a ruling on this.

But in the meantime I thought I heard citation 23(h), (i), and (j). Did I hear that? I thought I did. I don't know if the microphone picked it up, but, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, that's honestly what I thought I heard. If I'm wrong, then correct me.

3:00

Mr. Saskiw: That's correct.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Okay. So let us move on. Citation 23(h), (i), and (j) you already have. We've referenced them many, many times. It's similar to the point of order that was raised yesterday, and I am not going to take a lot of time on this. I would encourage you to read pages 686 and 687 of *Alberta Hansard* from March 17, yesterday, just to become more acquainted with this. It will help shorten up my comments right now. I would also encourage you to look at a couple of sections in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, regarding replies to oral questions.

I won't restate them all here right now. But it is frequently the case that someone says something in the middle of the debate, either as a question or as a response, and then hon. members sometimes react to it and there's a bit of disorder created or a little bit of a hubbub or something like that. In the end what happens in most cases is hon. members are encouraged to stand up and explain and clarify their position. Rarely is it a point of order, and I don't find it to be a point of order here. I think both sides have spoken and clarified on the record what their positions on this are, so we're going to conclude that matter and move on to the next point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: I believe the next point of order was somewhere right around 2:34 or somewhere in there. Anyway, proceed Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the exchange between myself and the Minister of Education, although I have to admit that I was not able to hear the end of the sentence, certainly the tone and the direction he was moving in and the first part of what I heard him utter would be enough for me to rise on a point of order and point out to him that in – specifically, he was talking about how I or my colleagues did not view apprentices as important.

I will just point out on page 508 of *House of Commons*, under Replies to Oral Questions: "According to practice, replies are to be as brief as possible, to deal with the subject matter raised and to be phrased in language that does not provoke disorder." Now, clearly, when a minister stands up and accuses a member of the opposition of not respecting a certain group or a certain postsecondary institution, it's meant to create disorder. It's meant to get me mad.

I'll also note in *Beauchesne's* 410(4) that "decorum is of importance," and it's expected that in responses to questions, in the replies to questions, that decorum should be respected and disorder should not be raised. In 417 of *Beauchesne's* again it mentions that answers to questions should deal with the issues and "not provoke debate".

Finally, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 23:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if [the member] . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member, which certainly was what was happening, and

(j) uses abusive or insulting language . . . likely to create disorder.

So I would ask that the member please withdraw his commentary, especially since I'm sure the member knows that most of the members of my family have graduated from apprenticeships in the trades and I would be less likely than many to be disrespecting those particular institutions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Maybe just before I hear from the Government House Leader or somebody on behalf of him, I could just refresh everyone's memory as to what was said. Unless, Government House Leader, you are prepared to do something now.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, this is more of a point of clarification. I appreciate the member's comments. I know she'd never want to create disorder in this Chamber.

The recollection that I have – and I don't have the benefit of the *Hansard* or the Blues – is that the Minister of Education had talked about: if anyone had said. Because he did not impugn another member or a member's caucus or anything, I don't believe that he is offside, making allegations against a member or false or unavowed motives, again, to another member. That's key. I don't believe that he named another member, Mr. Speaker. That was my recollection.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I hope there's no one else on this point. It's very straightforward.

I'll read to you, first of all, the exchange according to the Blues. The Member for Edmonton-Centre rose at approximately 2:34 and said the following:

The minister cannot seriously be trying to tell me that increasing and supporting opportunities for trades apprenticeship and skilled workers is answering my questions about postsecondary education that leads to a creative economy. Are you seriously expecting me to believe that?

The Minister of Education stood in response and said:

Goodness me, Mr. Speaker. If anybody thinks that apprentices are not important in our province and they don't contribute to a knowledge economy, I'm shocked. All postsecondary training is important in Alberta. University training, college training, apprenticeship training in our trades institutions: we support all of that. We believe that's very important to the future of our province. We want to see it continue.

I would agree, on one hand, that the Minister of Education did not directly comment as to who had uttered that feeling. He said: "if anybody thinks." I think that's where the Government House Leader is coming from. However, on the other hand, I think it was fairly clear that the minister was responding to, if not perhaps looking at, the Member for Edmonton-Centre. As you know, in all matters that come to the Speaker's attention, context, tone, all of those environmental things in terms of speech, are taken into account.

So I think there is a point here, hon. Government House Leader, that can be dealt with very easily if we just on behalf of the member do the right thing, and I'll allow you the floor.

Mr. Denis: I'll withdraw the comments on behalf of the Minister of Education.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That is officially withdrawn and dealt with, and that matter is concluded.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: Let us move on to the third point of order. I believe the third point of order was at approximately 2:39 p.m. and that it was Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills who rose during an exchange that involved the Minister of Service Alberta answering a question posed by Drumheller-Stettler. So let's hear the citation and the point of order.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically 23(h), and that's a point of order when a member makes an allegation against another member. The background here is that the minister in question stated, and I quote, that the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler was taking shots at an independent board.

Mr. Speaker, that's a serious allegation. The minister has made an allegation against the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler that he was taking shots against an independent board. That is very serious. These independent boards, as the minister had stated, are independent. Members should not be attacking them like that, and I would just simply ask that the hon. minister withdraw the comment, and we can get on with things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, again, this is more of a point of clarification. To say someone is taking shots, it's just simply taking questions, not making accusations or allegations. That's the spirit of question period. I don't think that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler did anything wrong, but similarly, with respect, neither do I think that the Minister of Service Alberta did.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Service Alberta, you wish to clarify briefly what you intended there? It would help, perhaps.

Mr. Khan: If I may, Mr. Speaker. It happens from time to time in this House that there are people who cannot defend themselves, as you know, in this House, and, as you also mentioned, the context and tone of particular questions also say as much often as the question. I've worked with this board. The board is comprised of quality people who are doing quality work on behalf of Albertans. I felt that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler was being very critical of this particular board, and I felt it was my duty to defend the board.

That was my interpretation of the comments, and I'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Is there anyone else on this? Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, briefly.

Mr. Saskiw: Yeah. I'd like to just quickly respond. I mean, the minister had himself criticized the same board in a letter that was written earlier this week. Of course, the question, if you look at the context, was criticizing the minister's appointment process, not the actual members in question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, this happened less than half an hour ago, and unfortunately we don't have the Blues available to us, so I can't really go into the verbatim exchange. But I'm going to take both

sides at their word here. I listened carefully to what I thought I heard the Member for Drumheller-Stettler saying, and I did not think that he was specifically taking a shot, as it's called, at the particular board in question. He may have been taking a shot at the government. I'm not sure. We'll have to read that. Nonetheless, what he uttered seemed within the rules.

The Minister of Service Alberta, of course, did stand up and say something about shots being taken at the same particular board and I think was trying to defend people who are not here, as he has already stated.

I think that clarifies the matter. We'll all watch our language going on. We know that we've got another week or so before the break. Perhaps we can sharpen up our comments and questions and answers in the next few days ahead. That leaves that point as clarified and now closed.

We will move on to the final point of order for today. I believe it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You had a point of order during a tabling.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, unfortunately, I'm unable to obtain a copy of *Beauchesne's* and therefore unable to provide you with a citation, so I don't really have a point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. That concludes that matter. We can move on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 18

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance regarding Bill 18.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 18, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015.

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015, will provide funding authority to all the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period beginning April 1, 2015. It is anticipated that funding authority for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, will be tabled in the House before that date. Approval of interim supply estimates is required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the last fiscal year and passage of a new budget.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 18. You know, when you look at the interim supply in particular, this is dealing with expenditures made from April 1, the day after the fiscal year-end of the government, until the passing of the budget, which typically takes maybe a month, I guess, maybe even a little less.

My question yesterday was with respect to the \$28 million that's being allocated to the Chief Electoral Officer in this interim supply. My question would be: what could occur in that time period, from April 1, 2015, to about the middle of May of 2015, that would require the expenditure of \$28 million by the Chief Electoral

Officer? What could that possibly be? I'm trying to wrack my brain on this. Maybe he's got some – I'm not sure what the Chief Electoral Officer would need all that money for during that period of time given that the President of Treasury Board indicated that the fixed election date is in 2016. It's very difficult. You know, we're debating this. We'd like to know what the response is. Like, why would we need to give the Chief Electoral Officer all this money? What expenditure is he going to make? Are there some capital expenses that he has to make? What would he need that \$28 million for?

You know what? In fact, there's a coincidence, Mr. Speaker. The Chief Electoral Officer said that to run a provincial election, it would be roughly \$28 million. So I'm just wondering if during that time period, that six-week period, whether – what could it be for?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to suggest that it's for an election. But, unfortunately, the President of Treasury Board said again and again that the fixed election period is a three-month period in 2016. You know, we debate large amounts of money in this Assembly. This bill is no different. In fact, there's a substantial amount of money. The minister should be required to provide details on how that money is going to be spent. The President of the Treasury Board did not do that; he failed in doing that. Mr. Speaker, how are we supposed to vote on a bill when the minister is not willing to provide us with any information?

The minister said that, you know, the Chief Electoral Officer is going to upgrade some electronic voting systems and that kind of thing, but he never gave any estimates on that. I was on the committee that hired the Chief Electoral Officer. He never at any point indicated it would cost \$28 million to upgrade the electronic voting systems and so forth. I think that would be a massive amount of money to do such a project. Of course, if that huge project was going to be done, clearly the President of the Treasury Board would want to tell the Assembly here what roughly \$30 million project the Chief Electoral Officer had in mind in the next month, but he didn't have an answer to that. For us in the opposition to debate on these substantial amounts of money, you would think it would be incumbent upon the minister to provide us with some information on whether we should vote yea or nay. These votes are very important, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, there's not enough information here that's been provided by the government for us to make a conclusive decision on this. They never separated the monies between operational and capital and financial in any of the departments. You know, it would be nice, Mr. Speaker, if they gave us an honest answer, in particular, to why that \$30 million is going to the Chief Electoral Officer. Just get it off their chest, and we can breathe a sigh of relief here in the Assembly that we'd finally know what was going to happen during that time period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are my comments.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by 29(2)(a).

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to admit that this gives me great concern. I have never seen an interim supply budget that asked for money in an interim supply act for the entire year. I have seen 19 budgets now and probably 14 or 15 interim supplies, which tells you a lot about the on-time ability of this government to produce a budget and get it passed before the fiscal year-end. It's somewhere close to complete failure. I've seen a lot of these interim supply acts. For people that are following along, this interim is meant to cover the period of time between the 1st of April, when cheques need to be cut – people need to be paid; programs and services, contractors, all of this has to go on. So the

government has to have permission to cut those cheques, to spend that money, and they haven't passed a budget; they don't have the permission. Thus, you have an interim supply act.

What I've seen is that generally they would give themselves about 40 per cent of any department's budget, which I always questioned them on, why they needed 40 per cent for essentially three months. But some departments are certainly front-end loaded; for example, ESRD with firefighting. Their costs tend to come in the summer. There are others with employment programs that tend to come up in the summer. A lot, obviously, of the construction, transportation, infrastructure: that money tends to be spent more in the beginning part of the year than in the latter part of the year. So there's some good standard reasoning behind certain departments but certainly not all departments to have that much money allocated to them for three months' worth of expenditure.

3:20

I've always seen interim supply that ceased. In other words, the permission to be running on an interim supply act ceased at the end of June. So they would give themselves money from the 1st of April through April, May to the end of June. That was the end of it. It was expected they would have a budget by then. This, Mr. Speaker, is giving them permission to spend this money without a budget until the end of the next fiscal year, which is pretty outrageous when you think about it. What it's indicating just on the factual face of it is that we won't get a budget. We may not get a budget at all. There may be no budget debate or any kind of explanation up front about how the government is spending its money because this is it. This is it. No explanation, no votes, no – well, they don't do roll-down votes anymore, anyway. But that's it.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So you want to know what's being spent in Aboriginal Relations? Well, \$51 million and change for expense and \$6 million for capital investment. Financial transactions: \$19 million. End of discussion. That's it. That's all you get. This is deeply troubling, and I'm quite concerned that this is a trick, and it's a bad one. It's a trick being played on all Albertans that the government would come forward with an interim supply bill that says: we're going to have interim money, between now and then money, for the whole year, until the end of March 2016. Twelve months' worth of expenditure, and this is the explanation. Just let me help you here. That's it, folks. That's it. That's it.

So why has this changed? I'd like to hear from the Minister of Finance on this. Why has this changed? Why have we now gone to an interim supply that gives the government permission to run on this till the end of March, March 31, 2016, an entire fiscal year? Now, I had enough problems with the government giving itself permission to spend money between the 1st of March and the end of June. But from the 1st of March, 2015, to the 31st of March, 2016, on this? Based on this? This is a mockery of this entire Assembly. It's a mockery of every financial officer that works for the public service. It's a mockery of every Albertan out there that expects there to be accountability and integrity in the way this government goes about producing a budget.

Mr. Mason: Oh, I don't think there are many left.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Well, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood believes there aren't many left, and nobody is meeting my eyes. That's always really interesting when that doesn't happen, Mr. Speaker.

This is bad enough. This is serious. I want to hear from the Finance minister why this is being done because this is unusual.

Why is the government giving themselves permission to go without a budget, without any kind of explanation or understanding except for a four-page document that – sorry, six pages. My mistake. A six-page document. And just in case anybody has forgotten, there's this really, truly bizarre way of explaining budgets now in which they give a budget amount for the Legislative Assembly, but here are the real goods. There is from general revenue an operational budget that is shown as section 2. Section 3 is capital investments. That's a separate line. Section 4 is financial transactions. God help us, what does this mean, Mr. Speaker? And section 5 is lottery fund payments. So you'd better have your calculator with you because you have to add all of these up in order to understand what's actually being spent in any given department because it doesn't tell you that. It doesn't give you the bottom line. It says: here are all the four different ways that they now allocate spending without actually telling us what the total is.

The note that I'd made to myself when I was thinking about interim supply was how angry I am with this government and how I'm angry and I'm disappointed because there's so much potential in this province. There is so much innovation going on out there in the private sector. There are so many people ready to do amazing things, and this government is lazy. Lazy. You have too much money, and all you do is dump money on something to solve the problem. It's lazy. You've done that for years and years and years.

We had a litany of examples that were brought up by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona during question period today. You know, why does this particular scandal or problem get money dumped on it when we can't get \$500,000 more for the Auditor General, who is actually trying to keep tabs on what's going on here? Over and over and over again she gives you explanations and examples of where the government has decided not to fund health care, children, all kinds of things, but they do find money, a lot of money, to pay for a golf course in Kananaskis. You would think that for all the problems you guys had created for you with that bloody golf course, you would never mention those words again. But then we look in supplementary supply, and there are millions of dollars that are being spend on flood . . .

An Hon. Member: Mitigation.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

. . . mitigation plus extra money to the operators to actually pay them for the nonoperation of the golf course while this mitigation is going on. Unbelievable. We have laziness, throw money at problems, don't spend money on other things, a total lack of imagination, and a lack of rigour, frankly. I am angry with that. There are a lot of good brains over there. There are a lot of committed people on the side opposite, and I just don't understand what makes you all go lockstep with this stuff and line up and mouth these points, when they get little notes that they're supposed to speak from. What's it called? Speaking notes.

Mr. Saskiw: Talking points.

Ms Blakeman: Talking points. Thank you. They line up and defend everything that the government is doing. I mean, okay. So we have these hide-and-peek games that the government spends, and it's, you know, it's serious game playing. We have a public release of somebody's phone records, of one of the member's phone records. Then the Premier calls for an internal investigation, but then it drifts off into somewhere else, and everybody goes: not my responsibility, not my problem. That's hide-and-peek. It is hide-and-peek.

I have personally, finally, yesterday received responses to written questions that were accepted 11 months ago. Eleven months it took this government to answer questions back to me, and, of course, I

didn't even really get the answers. You know, how can you have a straight face when you do stuff like this? Question: "What progress has been made on the formal commitment to develop the big-city charter, announced by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in a government news release on June 18, 2012?" And I get a response that lists things starting in October. It lists nothing between June 18, 2012, and October 7, 2014.

The Deputy Speaker: You're still on the bill, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: I am talking about interim supply, Mr. Speaker. It's about the process, it's about how much money is being expended, and it's about how well this government works in giving out any kind of information. You would think the opposition would be the first ones that would be getting information, not the last ones. How do we trust when we have an interim supply that's six pages long and gives us no information and then other examples of getting information 11 months later? Come on. That's not about providing information; that's about playing a game of hide-and-peek. It's meant to be insulting, it's meant to make my life difficult, and it's childish. Embarrassing.

What other little games do we have? Oh, yeah. We've got no information in the budgets anymore. They're starting to look like this. I mean, we used to get a few lines of roll-up where you could tell what programs were actually being funded. Increasingly we're looking at budgets where it's one or two numbers. That's it. You can't even tell what programs they fund anymore because they're not listed.

We have ongoing disrespect to opposition members where an opposition member asks a question and their personal finances are brought up as a way of answering the question. Now, how disrespectful is that, Mr. Speaker? Pretty disrespectful. That's going to be, you know, a reasonable answer to a question. Unbelievable.

Let's look at the money that's coming out here. I'm wondering if under the Health budget, in which we have an expense of \$4,690,537,000 and a capital investment of \$19,341,000 – okay, so this is a budget for a year, an interim supply for a year. You're putting more money in – I don't know – maybe less money. Are we actually going to get better health care out of this? What are the metrics? So far you haven't even been able to track what your timing is, and where you have tracked it, you've stopped telling us because you did so poorly on the metrics. Every time we get you to actually give us some way of judging and measuring how well you're doing, if you do badly, you just take the metrics away. It really is anger-making, so I have a right to be angry with this.

3:30

Mental health strategies. We all recognize that if you invest money into community-based mental health care strategies, it's going to save you money. Really? Is it in here? Where is it? No idea. How about the mental health care strategies for children? Is it in here? No idea. How are we supposed to know? When are we going to know? No idea. You know what this says? You'll get to know at the end, the 31st of March 2016, once the year has gone by. If this is under new management, I would say that this is real close to criminal, and I mean that. This is wrong on a lot of different levels.

In the last number of budgets we've noticed that the government has admitted that the number of roadways and bridges that are going to be in less repair, less quality – they budget more of our roads and bridges to go down in the quality of what they're doing there. Is that going to continue in this budget? Are we going to see any kind of additional help for what's going on? You see, the other thing that's not in here is any kind of budget comparison, so I can't tell if it's

more money or less money. I can't tell what programs have been cut or that the government plans on cutting over the next year, because there's no explanation here.

I know that all the groups from Culture have been hauled in and told with a very sad face by the minister: too bad, so sad; you've been cut off. This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Energy. Is that under 29(2)(a), hon. Minister of Energy?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's always been my observation in life and certainly since I was elected to this Chamber that there are far too many people in the world upon whom the entire point of the story of Chicken Little and Henny Penny is completely lost. That member might be one of them.

Mr. Speaker, the rules of this Chamber are absolutely clear. They're crafted by an all-party committee, and they're accepted by this Chamber. If the member alleges that somehow we have violated those rules of order, then she's perfectly capable, I would think, of calling a point of order. She has not done so. I believe we're fully in compliance with the rules of this Chamber.

Furthermore, the legislation governing the tabling of budgets and interim supply and supplementary estimates and all those things is absolutely clear. We table them in accordance with such legislation, and we provide for the appropriate times of debate and everything else. If she is of any belief that we're in violation of legislation, she should probably say so. She has not said so.

Mr. Speaker, from time to time governments table interim supply, which allows for interim spending while we're awaiting a budget that's not likely to be passed before the end of the year. The member knows full well that we're going to table a budget on March 26, and obviously subsequent debate on said budget will take us past the end of the year, so we're required to table interim supply, which will keep our employees, our civil servants, and the services that we provide to Albertans flowing. Without that, obviously, the government would come to a grinding halt, and I suspect nobody would be more upset than that hon. member. Clearly, we're not going to do that.

I'm sorry – and I'll apologize to the hon. member – if she finds it difficult to add three numbers, but the fact of the matter is that the format of the interim supply is absolutely in accordance with the legislation and in accordance with every other interim supply we've tabled in this House as long as I've been here.

You know, Mr. Speaker . . .

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

The Deputy Speaker: You have a point of order?

Point of Order

Question-and-Comment Period

Mr. Mason: The rules require the five minutes that are allocated for questions and answers to be shared, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, to be clear, the five minutes – and it's been applied liberally by this chair and other chairs – are usually questions and answers or, in many cases, comments. We've never cut a member off, be it the asker or the replier. Unless you expect some other rule to be changed, hon. member, that is what's been applied by this chair and other chairs in this Assembly.

Mr. Mason: With due respect, there is a subrule that has been enforced – and I don't know if it's been removed – that requires a fixed amount of time for question and answer per person.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you can cite me something that I'm not aware of, I will apply it, but if not, then we will proceed, and I'll let the hon. minister carry on.

Ms Blakeman: Excuse me.

The Deputy Speaker: Clarification, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: Well, sure. You can call it whatever you want.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a citation?

Ms Blakeman: Standing Order 29(2)(a) does allow for the five minutes, but it goes on to say: "to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments." Therefore, I'm assuming that the speaker has allowed time for me to comment back, because it does specifically say "responses."

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to respond that in my time in the chair I've seen it go both ways, where one individual has taken most of the time or the other has. This chair has never called on an individual to stop, and I haven't observed other chairs as well. Until we change the rules, I'm going to keep applying the rule as it has been.

I'll allow the hon. member to continue, and I would hope that he would pause and allow you to answer some of his questions, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: And if he doesn't, then you've not allowed me to respond.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I've got the floor.

Hon. members, the rule allows for five minutes of questions or comments, and until there is a change in that rule, I'm going to apply it as such. If the time is taken by one member for comments, so be it. If it's for a question, then so be it. But in the absence of any other rule, I'm going to apply the consistency that this chair has applied in my time in the chair and the time that I've observed other chairs that I've been here. Hon. member, I think we're killing time here.

I would invite the hon. minister to continue and, hopefully, allow the Member for Edmonton-Centre some time to respond to your points, sir. Thank you. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the interim supply numbers we presented here are consistent with the legislation, the rules of this House, and any other interim supply that we've tabled. Now, the hon. member knows quite well, actually, that the interim supply numbers are, of course, to provide spending for the government in the interim period, hence the name "interim," between the tabling and the passing of a budget which goes into the new budget year. It allows for the operation of the government. It's absolutely normal practice. It's in full compliance with the rules of this House and with the legislation. It's, actually, in fulfillment of the legislation. So that's why the government has done that.

It's normal practice, as it is – and the member knows – for the Chief Electoral Officer to request some money. The \$28 million in this budget is requested by the Chief Electoral Officer. It's quite often, in the event of interim supply within two years of an election, that the Chief Electoral Officer . . . [interjection] That hon. member wouldn't know because he hasn't been here for re-election. He's not going to be here for another one.

Mr. Speaker, within two years of an election it's quite common for the Chief Electoral Officer to request money in the event that an election might be held, and it is absolutely consistent, again in full compliance with the rules of this House and the legislation, that the legislation grants the Chief Electoral Officer that money. Hon. members opposite also know that in the event that the said event doesn't happen, the money lapses, as does all of the interim supply that's identified in the interim supply request, hence the name "interim."

The hon. member doth protest too much, so I am going to ask her a question. The next time interim supply estimates are tabled in this House, assuming that at some point interim supply estimates will be tabled to provide for interim supply in the event that a budget isn't passed before the year-end, could she change her speech from the last time that she protested about interim supply? You know, it's nice to refresh every once in a while, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you have 23 seconds to reply.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The majority of members that are on any of these committees that make the decisions and rules are members of the Tories. You may be fully in compliance, but you have certainly put forward an abnormal interim supply budget. The member has failed to explain why it is for March 31 a year from now rather than three months from now, absolutely failed to explain that, and there are many examples of the Premier changing his mind, including on budget date.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to make a few comments with regard to the interim supply. I did want to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre about her assertion that this was for the full fiscal year coming up. I know that the bill does talk about: "to defray . . ." – that is the term that's used – ". . . charges and expenses of . . . the Public Service of Alberta not otherwise provided for during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016." But if you look at the numbers and compare them to the amounts for certain departments in previous budgets or the total budget for the province of Alberta in previous years, the funds that are allocated in this budget are clearly insufficient to run a government for a full year. That was really what my question was to the hon. member.

It looks to me like it would be about four months' worth, just doing some ballparking in my head around the Health budget: about \$18 billion last year, and in this particular year it's about \$5 billion, presuming that it's going to go to \$20 billion given the change of mood, the lightening mood over on the other side, moving away from doom and gloom now to this rosy, pre-election outlook, this pill that they've taken that has improved their mood so much. I think the doom and gloom will quickly return following the election, Mr. Speaker, if they are fortunate enough to be given another term by the people of Alberta.

The point I really wanted to make is that it doesn't look, to me, like a full year's budget. It looks to me like about four months' worth of spending. It's an awful lot of money, though, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely correct. This is a very, very minuscule amount of information that is provided to the House, to the Assembly, in order to make the decision that is required. We certainly have no objection, you know, to voting interim supply for the government provided that a budget is brought forward relatively quickly and, hopefully, debated before the House is dissolved. That would be our view, that that budget needs to be

brought forward and debated and voted on before this House would be adjourned. That, unfortunately, is between the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor, and we'll see how it shakes out.

Now, that brings me to the point that was raised by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills about funding in the election. Since it is here, since there is money for the election in this interim supply, I think it's perfectly in order to make some comments with respect to the election. Now, I also believe that the legislation was passed by this House to set a three-month period for an election, being March, April, and May of 2016, which is next year. The intent of the Assembly and the intent of the government as expressed at the time was to provide some certainty to all parties and to the public about when an election would be held.

Now, it's clear that the Constitution of Canada would override any legislation that said that the head of the government can't go to the representative of the Crown and ask for the House to be dissolved and an election to be called. That's constitutional. The act includes that and anticipates that, so the question, really, put to me is: would an election now be illegal? The answer is no because the legislation does permit this to happen, but it was never the intent that we should continue to have elections at the whim of the governing party or every three years. It's expensive when governments have large majorities. Then there really is no reason other than their particular partisan advantage to have elections every three years.

Since I've been here, we've had elections more often at three or three and a half years than we have had at four, Mr. Speaker. It's a very common practice, and I think we have too frequent elections because the government can secure its own advantage. When I talk to constituents about this issue, to explain it I use an analogy. I say: it would be like a number of people running in a foot race, and one person gets to yell "go" when he's ready regardless of whether or not the other people in the race are ready. That is the system that this government is perpetuating. So, clearly, if they do go ahead with an election this spring, they're very much violating the intent of the law that was passed, that was introduced by them and supported by them, and, I think, being unfair.

Now, it brings me to the next point. I know, listening to the House leader for the Wildrose Party, that there's some anxiety on their part about having an election right now. I don't think they're ready, and I noted with interest the Premier's comments with respect to that. He said that it was up to the opposition to be ready for an election more or less at any time. Now, I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that we are ready, and we're expecting an election. We'll be running in all the constituencies. We have our candidates. We have the election machine that we need in place, and, you know, we're not afraid of an election.

But it is an incredible amount of gall for a Premier who just spent a great deal of time and effort wrecking the Wildrose Party, blowing it up almost, to then blame them for not being ready for an election two or three months later. I mean, I can't imagine the arrogance and the gall that it would take to say: well, you know, it's their fault that they're not ready. No. That was a calculated, deliberate attempt to destroy the Official Opposition of this province to obtain a temporary political advantage, which he will now take advantage of by calling an election that is clearly not intended under the legislation that all the parties supported at the time.

Those are my comments with regard to the funding in this budget for the election. I think that the cynicism of this Premier is record-breaking in its scope and depth, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know how much we can guess about the direction of the full budget, that'll be introduced, as mentioned, on the 26th, from the interim supply, but I think there are some interesting things to say. There is an increase in Culture and Tourism in the interim

supply. Now, I don't know if that will then be reflected in the actual budget, but it's interesting.

There's less capital investment in Health, Mr. Speaker. We have released a great deal of information in the last few months on the state of Alberta hospitals and the need for more hospital beds because of our growing province. We released documents that showed that only nine months into the 2014-15 fiscal year 1,376 surgeries had been cancelled across the province because of capacity issues, so I'm surprised that the capital spending for Health is not a higher priority in the interim supply. Carrying on with that subject, the number of surgeries postponed at the Stollery children's hospital has almost doubled over last year, and based on the previous year's numbers, all zones are likely to exceed last year's cancellation numbers.

3:50

There is also the question of overcapacity, the overcapacity protocol, how many times that's been activated. The highest risk overcapacity protocol was triggered 43 times in September 2014 in Calgary emergency rooms alone, and on the 24th of September, 2014, every single one of Calgary's ERs reported triggering high-risk overcapacity protocol. In the Edmonton emergency rooms in October 2014 overcapacity triggers were activated 344 times. We've released documents on the need to expand the maternal and the child unit at Northern Lights regional hospital. We showed that this is already insufficient to deal with the current population of Fort McMurray, let alone the population increases that may be expected. Those are just a couple of examples.

I think that we've looked at AHS preservation lists, which show the projects that need to be completed to ensure that our hospitals continue to function. These lists show 37 incomplete projects, totalling \$10 million, at Chinook regional hospital, 16 overdue projects at St. Michael's health centre. In Calgary the hospital lists outline a hundred million dollars' worth of overdue infrastructure maintenance projects in three major hospitals.

On the 17th of March, which was yesterday, we released documents about deferred maintenance at Edmonton-area hospitals. They outline \$225 million needed for critical infrastructure projects, which included 10 fire safety upgrades, including sprinklers, fire alarms, and long-awaited lightning rods; 11 unfunded asbestos abatements at the Royal Alexandra hospital alone; multiple elevator replacements and upgrades, a mould abatement at the Misericordia hospital.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that we need to be investing more in health infrastructure and not less. We've, I think, indicated that patient care is at risk and is suffering as a result of this neglect.

We've also released a document that outlines \$850 million in deferred maintenance in schools across the province.

The AAMD and C estimate that \$70 million a year for 10 years is needed for bridges alone. I have met with them several times, and they've talked about the bridges that are under their area of responsibility – these are not provincial bridges but those maintained by municipal districts and counties – and the fact that a number of bridges have to be closed more or less permanently because they are no longer safe. That's an important issue that I think needs to be addressed as well.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked a little bit about the need to support the officers of the Legislature. That's been a matter of some controversy. Conservative members of the committee dealing with the budgets of the officers, the Leg. Offices Committee, of course, had voted to provide an increase for the Auditor General. The Premier thundered from on high that there was no more money and directed the committee members to go back and reverse the decision, which they dutifully did. But it was a bad decision because

the Auditor General is our first line of defence against waste and ensures that government programs are working as they are supposed to. The government used the argument that our Auditor General has a bigger budget than Auditors General in other provinces, but it's important to note that our Auditor General has additional responsibilities as the Auditor of record for government commissions and bodies, which is outside the scope of other Auditors General in other provinces, so it's an artful dodge of the facts.

And then, of course, there's the children's advocate. We've seen ... [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Before I recognize the first speaker, if there is one, might I remind you of the spirit of the previous discussion we had, with no hard-and-fast rule. Standing Order 29(2)(a), any takers?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Anglin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the interim supply bill, it's somewhat comical. I suppose if it looks like a skunk and it smells like a skunk, you can draw any conclusion you want, but when you have a law that says that an election is supposed to take place in 2016 – we're supposed to believe that the Chief Electoral Officer is supposed to be ready for an election call at any time, that we have an interim supply that, you know, authorizes the significant amount of money to carry on an election. At this point in time we have a Premier who has now basically overruled a committee and said, "Go back. We don't have the money. We're going to be very prudent on what we're going to authorize for expenditures," which is kind of ironic in a way, I suppose. Put that together with some – I'm leaving the Legislature speeches, and, lo and behold, we're down to guessing exactly what day the writ is going to be dropped.

The question is this: is that all in good faith, realistically? We're talking about an election that affects all Albertans. Clearly, the government is calling an election, and it's playing a game, saying that it's not calling an election or it could call an election, but the reality is that we are now approving this authorization between now and June 30, and roughly between now and April 13 we're going to probably see the writ for an election call. It's hard to say. It's all a guessing game, and maybe we can play a drinking game with it. But the fact is that it's irresponsible when we're in a position of being prudent or claiming to be prudent and responsible with the taxpayers' dollars.

So I'll offer up some expenditures that could take place roughly this spring, that are significant. If the government wants to hold an election, clearly they probably want people to get to the polls, and there are a lot of rural bridges that need to be fixed. The only thing is that I don't know which members of which parties need to get across those bridges to get to the polls. Maybe the government should look into that before they actually hold the election. A lot of those bridges can be fixed for the sum of roughly \$28 million, and there are many other areas where we could apply the money. I think that's the key. I know it was brought up at the AAMD and C today.

With the austerity budget that everyone is expecting – and why shouldn't we expect that? The government told us that we should expect it. So if we're expecting cutbacks and cuts in services, clearly the Premier has told government employees: you need to come back to the table; you need to think about what you're planning on giving up. I mean, the message is absolutely clear. You can frame it any way you like, but the message is absolutely clear.

Now is not the time to actually hold an unnecessary election, when we passed a law that says that we're going to hold one next year. Someone said: well, you gotta spend the money anyway, and you're going to have to have an election. Well, if you have an election every three years versus every four years, you're spending a heck of a lot more money. The math is there. I mean, if it's going to cost you 20-plus million dollars – in this case we're looking at a proposed budget of \$28 million – doing that every three years versus every four years is an unnecessary cost.

4:00

It goes back to the whole issue of a good-faith promise. This Premier during his leadership campaign made that promise, that there will be an election in 2016. He made that promise. I suppose it goes down on record as the first promise broken. It probably won't be the last. But the public took him in good faith at his word, and now what we're seeing here is clearly the budget for an election call and the game playing and the gamesmanship of not even admitting it or not even telling the public when that election will be called. That's unfortunate. In my view, that shows bad faith.

I think this current government has an interesting case in front of it because it's all about opportunism. I mean, they decimated the Queen's Loyal Opposition or, depending on who you're looking at in the House, disloyal opposition. The idea of going into an election bodes very well for the government in power. It bodes extremely well, and that's the opportunism that they're confronted with. Clearly, they are going to take that, but that's not what the public has asked for. What the public has asked for is for them to abide by the law. What the public has said is: what we will allow you to do is to be prudent with our taxpayers' dollars, and we think you should be prudent and frugal with our taxpayers' dollars, and having an election every three years is not responsible.

With that, I think we've made that point. Regardless, I suppose we'll be going into an election in a few weeks, and people can make their farewell speeches over the next few days and into next week before the writ is dropped.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker. Are there other speakers to the bill?

I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Oberle: Call the question, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015.

The Municipal Government Act, or MGA, is one of Alberta's largest acts and creates the framework in which municipalities operate. Our government is committed to supporting communities. A key part of that is reviewing the MGA so that Alberta's municipalities have a strong foundation upon which to grow and thrive. Mr. Speaker, we worked closely with our municipal partners and stakeholders to develop the best updates possible for the act that will serve Albertans and their municipalities well into the future.

We're introducing this amendment bill to address 11 issues that found support from municipal partners and stakeholders. In addition, we are addressing some emerging issues and making some housekeeping amendments. A second amendment will be introduced in the fall based on solutions to more complex issues, with the ultimate goal of having a revised MGA by the end of 2016. Over the past year we hosted 77 meetings in 11 communities to hear from Albertans about how the MGA can best support municipalities.

We also received written input from more than 1,200 individuals, businesses, and organizations. After hearing from the public, we held extensive discussions with municipal partners and key business and industry leaders. The changes before you today have broad support from the municipal associations, the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, and key business and industry associations. Our goal is for the MGA to support municipalities in operating in an accountable, equitable, effective, and transparent manner. To further improve municipal accountability and transparency: a mandatory code of conduct for councillors to hold their elected officials to a higher standard.

Municipalities will adopt a public participation policy that considers participation of the public: their residents, business partners, and industry. Amendments for open council meetings will reinforce existing municipal transparency by clarifying when meetings must be held in public and when private meetings may occur, empowering municipalities to make the petition process easier for citizens through measures such as accepting online petitions, extending timelines for collecting signatures, and improving validation processes. Municipalities will be able to determine their own public notification methods, allowing them to save money and find methods best suited to the municipality and its people, including new and future technologies of communication.

These amendments will increase flexibility for municipalities to establish appropriate administrative roles, functions, and oversight while maintaining current separation between council to govern an administration to implement policy. To enhance municipal viability, these amendments will require municipalities to establish three-year operating plans and minimum five-year capital plans, to be updated annually. This raises the bar for municipalities to evaluate the full impact of present-day financial decisions against longer term municipal goals.

Bill 20 will introduce regulation-making authority for a new, streamlined process for municipalities that voluntarily wish to amalgamate and encourage a co-operative approach to amalgamation. Recent annexations have been highly controversial and received a great deal of media attention. Changes will enable the minister to make a regulation respecting existing annexation principles, processes, and procedures.

To strengthen municipal and intermunicipal planning, Bill 20 will identify the hierarchy and relationship of statutory plans so that each plan will be consistent with the plan above it. The amendments for subdivision and development appeal boards will require mandatory training for board members and clerks.

I appreciate the consideration and collaboration of our municipal partners and stakeholders in identifying these 11 issues as consensus items to move forward this spring, and I'm proud to support the recommendation for the MGA.

As I mentioned at the outset, Bill 20 will address some emerging issues. It will also enable the creation of charters as an important step towards realizing our shared commitment for the development of charters for the cities of Calgary and Edmonton.

The amendments related to off-site levies are proposed to allow municipalities to collect levies for one or more different types of infrastructure at different times over the course of development rather than requiring the developer to pay all the levies up front.

Bill 20 will also find a legislative home in the MGA for regulations under section 603 to ensure the important policies contained in these regulations will be maintained in the appropriate legislative framework. As well, these amendments address several housekeeping items to support consistency, clarity, and readability. The housekeeping changes also reflect recommendations and feedback received during public consultations, particularly from many Albertans who use the MGA regularly to guide municipal activities.

The MGA impacts every Albertan, the private sector, and every ministry within government in one form or another. We all live in municipalities, and we want the best for our communities. Updating the MGA to reflect changes in technology, new economic realities, and evolving municipal roles and relationships will give municipalities new tools to serve their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests? Is anyone opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the members of the MD of Taber, which is partly in my riding now. They've been up here for the AAMD and C convention, and I'd just ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

4:10

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 20

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015

(continued)

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015. This, obviously, is very important legislation, and my understanding is that there was an extensive amount of consultation with the provincial bodies AUMA and AAMDC.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I must say that this legislation falls far, far short in the sense that there has been no real massive, substantial reform in this legislation. What the government has done is picked out most of the changes that were readily agreed upon by almost all parties right at the outset. They've apparently spent a lot of tax dollars doing a lot of different meetings and so forth, but the reforms that are made in here I think most people on the face of it would readily agree to. The government has fallen far short of any real reform. There were a lot of recommendations that were provided, and the government apparently ignored those or didn't have the courage to put them forward here in the Legislature today.

Mr. Speaker, my understanding as well is that the legislation allows for the provision of city charters. What I will say here today is that I do not support increasing or providing for new taxation powers via city charters. It will be interesting to see whether or not

that's actually in the legislation, and in the Committee of the Whole we will be putting forward amendments on that to guarantee that that's the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The previous member is correct in that this version of the MGA was written in '95. I remember debating it quite a bit because there were a number of changes that it became immediately apparent needed to be addressed in the drafting of that.

This is one of our largest acts. It's got 18 sections, I think, and 650 different pieces to it. And because of the Canadian Constitution, of course, the province has the ability to set all the rules for the municipalities. That is set out in the Constitution. That becomes a strain when you have very large cities that, in fact, in some cases are larger than everywhere else in the province combined. They are their own economic driver, and they have particular needs that should be addressed separately that make them unique.

That is part of the strain that is happening right now in Alberta, in that all municipalities, every single one of them – Ryley, Tofield, Camrose, Peace River, Lethbridge, the city of Calgary, the summer village of Baptiste Lake – are treated exactly the same under this legislation. That's a problem because we have two very large cities which combined are two-thirds of the population of the entire province. To have them under the same constraints and limitations as a summer village or a small town is undoable in this day and age. I'll come back to that, but I think that's one of the most important pieces that's not been done.

I understand that these 11 changes are based on a consensus that came about as a result of numerous meetings, and I just want to go quickly through some of them. I'm a tiny bit amused – no, I'm really amused, not a tiny bit – at the requirement that municipalities adopt a code of conduct. Now, this is mostly around administrative procedures and not allowing a council to fire a councillor. But, in fact, this body does not have a code of conduct. We have a financial Conflicts of Interest Act. We have no code of conduct. There is nothing that tells MLAs that they're expected to have a constituency office or meet with constituents or have hours when they're available, nothing that says that they have to help their constituents, nothing that says what hours we have to work or how many days of holidays we're entitled to and whether there's any kind of an expected number of hours a week we put in or any kind of, you know, double time off if you put in more than X number of hours. Nothing. There is no code of conduct for us.

There is a Conflicts of Interest Act, which deals exclusively with financial conflicts of interest. It doesn't deal with integrity or ethics or anything else. If you review the last Ethics Commissioner report, she lays that out pretty clearly in dealing with the last matter that was brought before her. In fact, she does step out and recognize that the act is insufficient to comment wholly on the integrity of the individual. She does comment that it was a strained belief, that this wasn't going to help him in his election campaign when he'd already been appointed as the Minister of Education and was promising schools in the electoral division in which he was elected, but that wasn't a specific financial breach of conflict of interest according to the act. So I'm really interested to see that this group, that doesn't have a code of conduct, is implementing a code of conduct or requiring municipalities to develop a code of conduct.

There are a number of things that are very useful: clarifying when something is a meeting and when it's in private and how often that should happen, the issues around petitions and public notifications.

Clarifications around keeping council and administration separate should be maintained. This is perfectly appropriate and I agree with it, that municipalities should be required to adopt at a minimum three-year operating plans and five-year capital plans. Absolutely. I wish this place still did that. We did have that once upon a time ago. By the time you got to the third year, it was sort of fantasy, and then when we returned to the second year of the three-year plan, we found out that they had changed all of the performance measurements, so you couldn't actually match anything. Same thing happened.

The other problem here is how often the government is very late in actually detailing the amount of money that would be flowing through to these municipalities. So they're expected to make a budget without knowing what their revenue would be. Perhaps if the government could be a bit faster on their side, it would be more helpful.

I have questions about the hierarchy of plans, where the relationship of statutory plans will be sort of stacked. I'd liked to do some more investigation on that. Maybe the minister wishes to address it, or I'll come back in Committee of the Whole to do a bit more work on that because I'm interested in whether he's specifically relating the statutory plans to the land-use frameworks and also the different layers of plans that cities themselves have. For example, in my fabulous constituency there are mature neighbourhood overlays, which are plans that are expected to be adhered to, but they may also fall into an improvement area, or they might be under a zoning development. So what's being anticipated to be covered with this statutory hierarchy?

Of course, the biggest piece of this is the city charters, much anticipated by yours truly. But when I look at this from the start, it says, "on request by a city, the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which is, of course, cabinet, "may, by regulation, establish a charter for that city." By regulation. So that means that it doesn't come back in front of this Assembly. It gets done behind those big doors that I see closing opposite me, and there would be no opportunity for other public input and for opposition members to comment. I don't know if non cabinet members get to comment on that kind of thing, but "by regulation" means that it's not coming here, and I think it should. This is our second go at it because there is the 2005 charter for the city of Lloydminster, that was established. They don't seem to have put that one in regs.

Also, in viewing the specifics that are appearing under elements of the charter, under section 141.4(1) essentially everything is by regulation. Of course, when it's by regulation, the government can give, and the government can take away. So we have a set-up here where the city of Edmonton, for example, could request a charter. By regulation it could be set up. But, you know, if the city of Edmonton doesn't please the government, perhaps doesn't elect enough of a certain kind of MLA, they can have their charter taken away just as easily as it was put there because it's by regulation. It's not by legislation which would become a statute that is produced by this Assembly. The government gives, and the government takes away.

4:20

The second thing that's very odd in here – and perhaps the sponsoring member can clarify this. Under 141.4(3)(c): "authorize the charter city to modify or replace a provision of this Act, or any other enactment, by bylaw." That reads as though a city bylaw under the charter can change a statute put forward by the government. I must be reading this wrong, but please explain to me how I'm reading this wrong because it sure looks to me like that's what can happen, and I'm sure that's not what is intended.

The way this is reading to me is that it's a plan about having a plan about establishing a charter, and I'm concerned about that. The first time I raised city charters was in the election in 2008, which is now seven years ago, and my caucus and I – it's part of our platform – have continued to raise it. The first time I think it was raised here was quite a ways in. For certain it was mentioned by the previous Premier by two, who used it in her leadership race, I think, and talked about it, and that was in 2012. Since then there really hasn't been anything concrete move forward, and I don't see it being concrete in what's set out before us in the provisions.

There was a memorandum of understanding to work on it, which expired. A few months ago everybody tripped down to Calgary in their best suits and sat in line, and the Premier got up and announced with great solemnity and happy, expectant faces on the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary that they were going to have another memorandum of understanding, at which point I'm pretty sure I saw the faces of those two mayors settle into a grimace because that was not what they were hoping for. We still have no idea when we might be actually expecting a charter to be implemented, and I'm very concerned that this was being done by regulation. That definitely needs to come out and be done as a separate act, not because I think any of us particularly wants to fiddle with it or change anything or amend it, but this is serious, and I don't want to see this meddled with behind closed doors.

The other examples that I could find of city charters – and the obvious one is Toronto, for example, or Vancouver. I'm embarrassed to tell you that even Manitoba has a City of Winnipeg Act, so that kind of puts us to shame, that they managed to beat us on that one. Those are all stand-alone legislation, so they have their own act that is its own statute, and that's not what's being anticipated here.

I am looking for clarification. I honestly have not had a chance to talk to anybody on city council or in their administration about whether they agreed to this, but I'm finding it very hard to believe that they did because as far as I can tell, based on what I read that the mayor of Edmonton says or the mayor of Calgary, what they're asking for isn't here. This is another possibility of moving towards something eventually. So I do have concerns about it. There's a retroactive operation. There's no effect on the status. I just really have questions about how this is being put together. I don't think it's what people were anticipating.

There are a couple of sections here in the act that are obviously catch-up sections because they're things that have been going on for quite a while. A lot of it is utilities, municipal finance clarification, local improvement road tax bylaw, that kind of thing. One of the things that I'm not seeing in here is any understanding of the severe limitations that municipalities operate under, particularly the large municipalities, the limitations that they operate under financially. The property tax does not address growth, never has, never will. It doesn't help the cities to pay for things that are in response to growth, and, yes, the people that move here bring their taxes, but the cities are the one level of government that doesn't get a piece of that income tax. Federal government gets it, provincial government gets it, but the municipalities don't get any piece of income tax.

Long ago I brought forward a bill in this House – I think it was 204 – that asked that a transfer fund be set up so that a portion of income tax could be put into it and transferred to the cities to allow them to provide all the things that we expect out of cities now. I think what I'm hearing and certainly what I hear a lot of at the doors is that people feel that the municipalities, the cities, don't have the money to provide what people are expecting, like snow removal.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 20. I understand that Bill 20 is a result of consultation with municipalities, the two largest cities, with the AUMA, and with AAMD and C. I understand that a consensus has been achieved on the items contained in this bill and that there are many other issues where no consensus has been reached and that may or may not be the subject of further legislation after the election. I think the government has brought forward, you know, an incomplete bill, but it does represent those matters upon which agreement has been reached.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I do have some thoughts with respect to some of the elements in this. One of the things that we didn't hear from the member who introduced this bill is what a code of conduct is intended to cover. What does the government have in mind in terms of the code of conduct? The Member for Edmonton-Centre has indicated that there's not one for MLAs. Nevertheless, I think that elected officials do have to adhere to high standards.

But I am cautious when I consider what possibilities might be for municipal councils to impose codes of conduct on their members. Having been a member of a municipal council for many years and at times at odds with the majority of my colleagues on certain matters, including secrecy, for example, I am worried about the ability of municipal councils to restrict the legitimate political activities of city councillors to bring to light matters that they think the public should be aware of. That is my serious reservation, so I will be very interested in hearing from the minister on this, hopefully in second reading but if not, in committee, because I have a number of questions with respect to the intent here.

I know that under the bill the minister is given the authority to make regulations that will help define what is and is not in a code of conduct, and that is something, I think, we need to look closely at. Once again, the framework legislation model that the government prefers, to allow the meat of any act to be put into regulation, to be determined by the cabinet at its discretion as opposed to being put out in the legislation for the whole Assembly to see and to debate, is a real concern with respect to this.

4:30

The question of the city charters is an interesting one, and as has been noted, this does not limit the provision of charters to Edmonton and Calgary. Now, the main impetus for this has come from those two cities, particularly from the city of Calgary. I would be very interested in knowing, again, a lot more about what the longer term goal is for the legislation. I think that the case can be made that the two largest cities are of a sufficient size that they may require additional authorities that other municipalities do not have and additional capacities to meet those obligations that may not apply to smaller cities or to towns and villages.

I did have the honour during my municipal career of serving on the board of directors of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for a number of years, and I chaired a committee on the future status of municipalities. We had established at that time the position on behalf of the FCM that there should be certain things recognized in municipal legislation that were fundamental principles. There were three of them, that I recall, that were very significant.

First of all, the municipalities should be given clearly defined roles and responsibilities, things that they're responsible for, and they should be allowed to discharge those responsibilities without

undue interference from other orders of government. That was the first thing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, they had to have access to the financial resources in order to fulfill those responsibilities and not be dependent on other orders of government to fund those things. That could either be through a taxing power or through some designated, specific funding that was allowed for in the legislation, that would allow them to conduct those responsibilities.

Finally, the third principle was that municipal officials should be accountable to their own voters for the discharge of those responsibilities and the taxes or other charges that they may or may not set and not to another order of government.

I think those principles are very important, and I would hope that future legislation following up on Bill 20 would recognize those three principles. I particularly think that it's important that those principles be enshrined in any charters that might be considered.

I think that it's useful to have good, clear guidelines on the protection of personal information.

I have been in the past a strong believer in the right of citizens at the municipal level to petition their municipal government for specific things – specific bylaws, for example – and to have the right, if enough people signed the petition, to place matters on a municipal ballot. I think that that's a very important piece as well.

The act continues the long-standing principle of municipalities not running deficits. I don't see any reason to change that particular position at all.

I think that increasing transparency and accountability is important, and the act goes some way in those areas.

The other issue that I think is important is the issue of council secrecy, and I know that the previous municipal act outlawed private decision-making and required council to come into the open. It can certainly discuss matters behind closed doors but must make any decisions in public. I think that it must be continued.

One of the councils of the four that I served on decided that it was going to make decisions behind closed doors. There were all of these special meetings that were happening that the public didn't know about, and major decisions were being made. This was clearly not allowed. One of the things that happened is that at a certain point in the development of the long-term plan for the city – this is the city of Edmonton – they were making decisions behind closed doors. The administration then came forward with a report, which included a timeline of decisions that included those decisions at those meetings.

So what I did was to go to a council meeting and make an inquiry about how those decisions had been made. Well, no sooner had I gotten back to my office than I had the general manager of planning and development with his lawyers in tow show up in my office. The administration didn't like what was going on either, to be very honest with you, Mr. Speaker. But at some point, when they had to report on the progress of the development of the master plan for the city, they had to include the fact that key decisions had been made behind closed doors, which was illegal. So it blew the whole thing up. The mayor wouldn't speak to me for a month, but in actual fact it ended the practice of secret meetings.

I think that it's absolutely important that we maintain those kinds of requirements in the Municipal Government Act. It is the order of government that is most close to the people. It deals with issues that are very concrete in most cases. They deal with roads and fire protection and municipal facilities and so on. There's no reason why a high level of transparency cannot be maintained at the municipal level, and I think that, by and large, it has been. It certainly is a shining example for this government about how transparency can operate in government. You can get good government, and the public involvement that flows from an open

process, I think, is very valuable, Mr. Speaker. So that's a really important consideration, in my view.

4:40

I think that if we maintain the principle that municipal government does not run deficits, that it has an open and transparent process, and that its elected members are responsible to their voters rather than to other orders of government for their actions, we'll be continuing on the right track.

Alberta actually was a leader, back when I was first on council, with the new Municipal Government Act, giving first-person powers to municipalities. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you and I were both involved in municipal politics at that time, and this was a very progressive step forward.

I think we need to continue that progressive direction of allowing municipalities more and more authority, treating them as an equal order of government rather than as the child of the province, which is, I think, one of the flaws in our 1867 Constitution. It sees municipalities as junior partners or children of the provinces. I think we need to move away from that. We can't change the Constitution readily, as I found out in the FCM, but we can adopt an adult relationship with our municipalities through our legislation and treat them as equal partners, and I think that the Municipal Government Act needs to do that and adopt that as a fundamental principle.

Those are my comments with regard to this act, Mr. Speaker. We will be supporting this piece of legislation, but clearly the real difficult decisions are going to perhaps come forward in the next iteration of the Municipal Government Act. I would just point out that many of these decisions have been delayed and delayed and delayed, put off until the next election and then put off until the election after that. An example would be the charter in this respect.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to participate in second reading debate on Bill 20, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2015, on behalf of Minister McQueen. Alberta municipalities need a solid legislative foundation to support the strong local and regional decision-making required for municipalities to thrive. On January 22 the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs made a commitment to complete the MGA review by working together with our municipal partners. The MGA review framework memorandum of understanding agreement was signed by the Premier, the minister, and presidents of the municipal associations and supported by the mayors of Calgary and Edmonton. This bill is a major milestone towards fulfilling that commitment.

I know that the minister is very proud of the collaborative process that produced this bill and that continues to produce consensus and strategic direction for additional amendments that will come forward this fall. Many hours of fruitful discussions with President Helen Rice of the AUMA, President Al Kemmere of the AAMD and C, Mayor Nenshi, and Mayor Iveson were spent to identify where the MGA should shift to best support municipalities into the future. This round-table met with representatives of key economic sectors in Alberta to see where consensus could be found on the issues to move forward this spring. Bill 20 is a result of those discussions.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 20 is a result of working together to serve Albertans at the municipal, provincial, and business levels

throughout the province. These proposed amendments to the MGA contain municipal-driven solutions to address 11 issues that found broad support from municipal partners and stakeholders.

Our goals for the MGA are to support municipalities in operating in an accountable, equitable, effective, and transparent manner. To enhance municipal accountability and transparency, a mandatory code of conduct for councillors will provide municipalities with a tool to hold their elected officials to a higher standard. Municipalities will adopt a public participation policy that considers participation of the public – the residents, business and industry, and other relevant stakeholders – in order to enhance transparency in consultation processes with their communities. As well, amendments for open council meetings will reinforce existing municipal transparency by clarifying when meetings must be held in public and when public meetings may occur.

Bill 20 will empower municipalities to make the petition process easier for citizens through various changes that our stakeholders have asked for. This shift will make it easier for the public to successfully petition a municipality and will provide greater flexibility for municipalities by bylaw to vary requirements for petitions to municipal councils.

To enable more efficient municipal operations, Bill 20 will empower municipalities to determine their own public notification methods. This shift modernizes the way municipalities communicate to the public, enabling cost saving and accessibility by allowing for current and future technologies to be used for public notification purposes. These amendments will allow for municipalities to be more flexible in being able to establish appropriate administration roles while maintaining status quo separation between the council to govern and the administration to implement policy.

Municipal viability will see amendments that require municipalities to establish a three-year financial plan and a minimum five-year capital plan. These will be updated on an annual basis. This will empower municipalities to consider the full impact of present-day financial decisions against longer term municipal goals and create a more transparent process for the community to better understand the workings of their municipal governments.

Regulation-making authority will be granted for a new, streamlined process for all municipalities who want to voluntarily enter the amalgamation process. This change is being made to increase efficiencies and encourage co-operation. Bill 20 also presents changes that will enable the minister to make regulations respecting existing annexation principles, processes, and procedures.

Bill 20 will also address municipal planning by identifying the hierarchy and relationship of statutory plans so that each plan will be consistent with the plans above it. This is something that has been missing in the Municipal Government Act and will be certainly welcomed by all municipalities.

The amendments for the subdivision and development appeal boards address concerns over training. Mandatory training for board members and clerks will be required going forward. It will also create a placeholder in the Municipal Government Act to enable the creation of charters for Edmonton and Calgary, a commitment publicly announced last fall.

The amendments related to off-site levies are proposed for collection over the duration of a development project as opposed to all at once at the beginning of the project. These levies would be collected for one or more different types of infrastructure, and this is certainly something that will enable the development industry to better finance and get their projects off the ground.

Bill 20 also addresses the various regulations under section 603 to encapsulate some pieces of legislation while others will have regulatory authority enabled. Bill 20 is also addressing various housekeeping amendments. These reflect recommendations and

feedback received during public consultation, particularly from the many Albertans who use the Municipal Government Act regularly to guide municipal activities.

As one of the largest pieces of legislation in the province of Alberta the MGA impacts a significant number of stakeholders and Albertans. We hope to update the legislation to reflect the realities Albertans face today, be it our current economic times, evolving roles of the municipality, or reflecting current technology. We endeavour to create the best conditions for our municipalities, and I'm confident that this bill addresses changes needed for that. Albeit this is the first step in a very long process of amending the entire act, it is one that has been reached by a collaborative process. It has brought the many stakeholders together at the table around a consensus base, and moving forward on the more difficult issues will be all that much easier because of the relationships established over the last year with the many stakeholders involved in this process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

I'd invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to close debate.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. I appreciate the comments on all sides of the House, and I would ask that we call the question on second reading of Bill 20, please.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Rogers in the chair]

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

Bill 16 Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015. This is an omnibus bill that has rectified a whole bunch of little issues in different departments. The Wildrose Official Opposition will be supporting this legislation.

Mr. Chair, besides some really, really minor housekeeping issues, there is an amendment that would provide for there to be two Associate Chief Justices rather than one in this province. I think this is peculiar to Alberta and Quebec, which have a two-city dynamic. You know, I think the hon. Member for Little Bow did a great job explaining why that would be necessary in this province.

The second change has to do with the Land Titles Act and allows for electronic filings for land title documents as well as e-signatures. I think that's simply catching up with other provinces in that respect. Most other provinces do that. Then there's also a very minor issue where they close a loophole in the insurance portion of that particular legislation, which we have no objections to.

The amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act: they are simply correcting mistakes with respect to the status of the board of governors of Medicine Hat College as well as the board of SAIT. They weren't discovered till recently. It appears this amendment clarifies that with respect to two orders in council, the 1970 order

on Medicine Hat and the 1982 order with respect to SAIT, neither was rescinded. In fact, the board of governors of both institutions, according to this amendment, would have been operating lawfully throughout that whole, entire time, and I don't think anyone would disagree with that. I don't think it's retroactive legislation but just simply clarifying that they were operating legally. It's probably a good thing that they weren't operating outside their bounds for the last few decades.

The Provincial Court Act introduces the concept of binding judicial dispute resolution proceedings. This would occur pretrial. Right now the situation is prior to the Provincial Court hearing. You'd have a judge that would talk with both parties, get an explanation of what witnesses they would call and what evidence each side would present. The judge would then provide both parties with an explanation of what he or she would decide if that case was heard before them. What this would do is that it would go one step further. It would be binding in advance, so both parties would be subject to that decision. I think this would provide more flexibility within the court system. It would be interesting to see how this works. I think a lot of parties, especially with smaller claims, would rather just have a quick trial, without the expense of getting a lawyer, although lawyers could still be involved in these cases, especially with the increase in the small-business claims amount.

Also, there are 11 sections of the act relating to civil claims that are being removed from the act and put into regulation, and this would allow more flexibility on a go-forward basis. Without having to come to the Legislature to make an amendment, the minister could simply adjust that. The most obvious one is the level for the small claims amount. You know, I think the limit right now is 50 grand, which is still pretty low, especially with a lot of the litigation that's going on right now and could go on even more so if the economy keeps on its current trajectory.

Mr. Chair, we support this piece of legislation, and we do not have any proposed amendments in this regard. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole on Bill 16, Statutes Amendment Act, 2015. I know the Minister of Energy will be awaiting the usual statements that I make on my concern about rolling together a number of acts which, to my eye, are completely unrelated here. This is the sleight of hand that the government performed when they moved from miscellaneous statutes to calling these just a statutes amendment act, which means that the opposition is no longer consulted on which pieces they feel are significant enough and have a significant enough change in its originating act to be pulled out and debated separately.

My biggest concern when I looked at this act was particularly based on the moves that the Justice minister has been talking about but also implementing around the traffic court – it would now move to having the hearings not presided over by a judge, there would be no appeal, and the police officer that laid the charges wouldn't be in court; it would be based on their notes – and a number of other concerns there, where I really thought that people were not going to get their day in court and wouldn't get their appeal if they felt there was something truly wrong. So I looked at these justice statutes with some dismay.

However, my concerns about the traffic court are not reflected in the amendments that I'm seeing here, or at least not to the level that I've been able to investigate them given the time that we've had. The judicial changes, the Court of Queen's Bench Act amendments: that's obviously about that our population has increased but the number of judges and courts that we have to hear everything has

not increased, and it's put the backlog of cases to quite a timeline, that's moved far beyond where it should have. I think this is an attempt to shorten up the timelines there.

The number of sections that are being moved to regulation always makes me nervous, but most of what is being moved there are the civil claims. They really don't like being called this, but I think that for most people they understand it as small claims court. But we should learn to be calling it civil claims because there's nothing small about it anymore, and that does not understand and give respect to the people that are working in those courts.

Under civil claims we've got sections on issuance of civil claims, dispute notes, notice of hearing, change of hearing, service of documents, service of counterclaims, notice to attend, proof of service, payment into court, adjournment, parties confined to particulars, and admission of liability, so all of those sections, which are really the sections in the act between, I think, sections 25 and 35. Then we also have sections 38 and 40 to 44, which are conclusion of a claim and processing of judgment to the court. That's including withdrawal of claims, default judgments, failure to appear, setting aside judgment or dismissal, counterclaim, and costs and interests. Those are all going into regs, which means they don't come back here. They can be changed by an order in council or by ministerial order. I think all of that is fine.

5:00

The Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education. Now, when I first asked about this, I thought perhaps it was the moving of Mount Royal and MacEwan universities from a level 2, which is, really, larger undergraduate universities, and that they're very much interested in moving up to a level 1, which is the comprehensive research and intensive undergraduate and graduate studies. But, no. In fact, this was fixing mistakes that the government made some time ago, where they accidentally rescinded some powers of the board. So they are moving that back.

The land titles amendment is great. Thank you for that, and a big sigh of relief that they didn't privatize the Land Titles Act, because that's what everybody was worried about. But, no. In fact, this is allowing for electronic signatures.

I am curious, and I haven't had time to do a very good stakeholder loop with the changes that are coming under Culture and Tourism. What's being done here is that the foundation that gets the money has been changed into the sport connection. Originally this was Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife, which is the second of the big lottery foundations which received money from the lotteries and disbursed it to enhance quality of life. So you have the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife; and then we had Wild Rose, which was deleted or repealed some years ago.

I was concerned that the recreation, wildlife, and parks portion was being dumped. It's not. It's being transferred to the department, but I am concerned that this could be signalling less interest by the government in those areas in that the sports get special recognition and get to keep the foundation, and there's also land that was donated to it specifically, which the foundation is now going to be allowed to sell off. I do wonder if this is a degradation or a signalling of less support for those areas of recreation. Things like orienteering, anything that's sort of active lifestyle but not sport directed, would have been included in that recreation.

Wildlife, of course, is covering groups like the Wilderness Association, the World Wildlife Fund, a number of those organizations that do absolutely amazing work on pinched pennies, especially given the direction this government likes to go on very strange decisions around animal habitat. I'm a little worried about that one, so I'm withholding my judgment on that.

The remaining sections, I think, were all fine. Yeah. I just have the concern about moving that much regulation, but it appears to be for a good reason. I will support that although it shouldn't be made precedent or taken as precedent for any reason.

The Police Act is retroactive, I think. It's to make sure that any decisions that have been made are still legit if they had a previous police officer or a retired judge that was running the hearing. The Alberta, Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act; the Land Titles Act; the Post-secondary Learning Act: I've covered everything there.

I have reservations, and I'll try to get my homework done before — oh, this is Committee of the Whole. Okay. I'll try to get the rest of that work done before we're in third reading so that I can better articulate my concerns around that, or maybe they will have been relieved by that point.

So thank you for the opportunity. I am still interested in why Mount Royal University and MacEwan University cannot fulfill whatever the government is looking for to elevate them to a level 1, because they're certainly interested in doing that. But I'll leave that for the time being.

The Liberal caucus is in favour of supporting this bill. We just really don't like the use of the Statutes Amendment Act to roll everything together. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Is there a minister present that we can, you know, direct questions to? In committee sometimes you can get answers from ministers with respect to the legislation at committee stage.

The Chair: We have the bill's sponsor here.

Mr. Mason: Oh, boy. They're letting you do something. Okay. Good luck.

Okay. Well, I want to begin, Mr. Chairman, by echoing the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, and this is something that we've said ever since this change was brought in, that we do not like the fact that in some cases more substantive amendments are included in an omnibus bill. It used to be that items were agreed to in advance by consensus, housekeeping types of changes and so on, but the government in recent years has adopted the practice of putting in things, not always really dramatically important things but more substantive things and things in which there's not a consensus amongst the parties in the House. That changes things. We used to be able to give it unanimous consent without debate. Now, of course, it's debatable, and it takes time. So I just want to indicate that, by and large, despite that reservation, we do not have any basic problems with the various components of this act.

First of all, the Provincial Court Act. It changes the maximum for civil matters that the cabinet can allow from \$50,000 to \$100,000 and updates the resolution mechanisms to allow for more flexibility. The Court of Queen's Bench Act adds a second Associate Chief Justice, and that will, we understand, assist in the progress through the courts and allow the Chief Justice to give direction on what the masters can hear and what they cannot. I'd like a little bit of clarification on why that is an important piece of this legislation. So if the hon. member can help me with that, I would be very grateful.

Mr. Donovan: I just got a note on that one. Can you just give me a brief...

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Mason: Do you want me to go on to something else?

Mr. Donovan: No, no. Just ask your question again. I was just reading another part. I'm sorry.

Mr. Mason: Sure. Yeah. One of the changes under the amendment that amends the Court of Queen's Bench Act will allow the Chief Justice to give directions on what masters can hear and what they cannot. Why is that change important?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you for the question. The amendment on the Chief Justice, the powers directed on the masters side: that allows the preliminary hearing on civil matters for applications involving bankruptcies. They can also hear certain applications under the Maintenance Enforcement Act. I think we're just trying to free up some time in the courts, allowing the masters to deal with some of those.

The Chair: Thank you, and for the record that was the Member for Little-Bow. I think I called him something else.

I'll go back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:10

Mr. Mason: Yes. I've called him something else, too, before, Mr. Chairman.

I just have this question. My notes say that the Post-secondary Learning Act is being changed in Bill 16 to correct a mistake that occurred with orders in council, which accidentally abolished the boards of SAIT and Medicine Hat College. Did that really happen? Did you really do that? Were they mad?

Mr. Donovan: I think it was a clerical error at some point. The order in council established the college board in 1970 for Medicine Hat, and SAIT was done in 1982. Going through there, there were some errors discovered, and the information was requested to respect one of the institutions, and that's when it was identified. So we're just trying to clarify and fix the problem that was identified.

The Chair: Back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Raising the civil claims to be heard in Provincial Court to \$100,000 may be a positive, but it will also have an impact on the work of the court. I think there's a legitimate concern as to whether or not the capacity is there and whether or not enough funding is going to be provided by the province in order to allow them to handle those additional cases.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The goal of this was to make the civil justice system more effective. Now, the amendment from cabinet will increase it to \$100,000 from \$50,000. However, it should be noted, hon. member, that the current maximum limit for the civil court matters will remain at \$50,000, which was set in 2014. The proposed amendment gives the government the option to raise the limit to \$100,000 at a later date if required without amending the legislation, just so it's easier to be able to go through and do that.

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask about section 6(9), that deals with hearing procedures, which will allow the court to direct some of the hearing procedures like the amount of hearing time, the number of witnesses, the amount and type of testimony and evidence as well. I'd really like to know what the purpose of that change is and how we can protect individuals' fundamental rights to access justice and a fair trial if this greater scope is given.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just trying to dig up 6(9) myself. I was hoping he was going to go for 13(1) of the regulations, but I didn't have that luxury.

Mr. Mason: It's easier to ask questions than answer them.

Mr. Donovan: That's why I truly appreciated being in the opposition also at one time in life. Sometimes you have to make the decisions rather than just look at them.

I'm going to have to get back to the member on that. I'll have to dig through that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. members, before I go back to the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly a councillor from Mackenzie county, Eric Jorgensen, who's here at the AAMD and C convention and has stepped into the House this afternoon to watch the proceedings. I'd ask Eric to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 16

Statutes Amendment Act, 2015

(continued)

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you want to speak again, or are you satisfied?

Ms Blakeman: No. I have to do more work.

The Chair: Okay. Then back to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: That concludes my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. Are there other speakers at this time?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 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.

**Bill 15
Securities Amendment Act, 2015**

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly to Bill 15 in Committee of the Whole. I think the Securities Amendment Act, 2015, really takes us back to the lead-up to the 2008 global financial collapse because at that time the market for over-the-counter derivatives was mostly unregulated. So there was a whole – well, who knows? – countless number of transactions that occurred that were completely invisible to any kind of securities oversight or regulation or monitoring or compliance. I think it's generally agreed by a number of people that watch this sort of thing that that was a bad idea.

There's been quite a bit of work done since then to put in place some regulatory reform of over-the-counter derivatives around the world. So we're catching up and we're harmonizing, which is essentially what's happening here. There are enforcement-related amendments here and then a harmonization, all of which needs to happen.

I just find the funniest part of this, if I'm allowed to do that, is that they've had to change the definition of "associate" so that they can pick up the one-night stands for exchange of information.

Mr. Saskiw: Whoa. Language. Language.

Ms Blakeman: One-night stand is language?

Well, because it was relying on the definition of adult interdependent partner, which was the invention of my beloved colleagues opposite as a way of trying to get around not recognizing same-sex marriages. So they invented this whole other grouping of people, which, of course, included everybody that wasn't a male and female that were married. But in that, it's all about long-term relationships. It's about two years plus, and they don't kick in until you've gone two years unless there's a child or unless people signed a contract. That was how that was set up. So if you actually had a shorter term relationship – in other words, anything from a one-night stand to a one-year-and-363-days stand – you would not be captured under the current definition of "associate," and you could have all the pillow talk on over-the-counter derivatives that you wanted to without coming under any kind of prohibition.

In the delicate wording that you always find with this, it's meant to capture persons cohabiting in a conjugal relationship who are sharing material information for the purpose of insider trading. They're trying to ensure that they're capturing people that are not covered under that. It's a very serious matter, Mr. Chair, but I just knew that definition was going to bite this government in the behind a number of times, and that's one of those times.

Given that, our Liberal caucus is in favour of what's been proposed here. We have duly slogged our way through all of the different sections. This is one of these bills that take a lot of time to find out not a heck of a lot, but we appreciate the work that's been done, particularly around regulation on this one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other speakers on the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 15 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.

5:20

**Bill 13
Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015**

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise here today to speak to Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015. I just have a few questions regarding this particular act. What this act is doing is that it is making mandatory the inspection of boats entering our borders. I'm just wondering whether or not someone can answer some questions about where exactly these monitoring stations are going to be and whether the government is going to have to purchase land in order to create these monitoring stations. Right now my understanding is that boats are inspected on a voluntary basis and that there are a little less than half, like 40 per cent or so, of individuals that voluntarily allow their boats to be inspected upon coming into the province of Alberta. My question is whether or not the government is proposing to purchase land for these sites. Is there anybody on the other side that's speaking to this?

The Chair: Hon. member, I'll recognize the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Do I do my amendment first?

The Chair: Well, you could answer that question and then . . .

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. Those details haven't been worked out, but right now the inspections are going to take place at the various places that we have already like the weigh scales, and so on. But purchasing land and any of that, hon. member, hasn't even been brought up for discussion.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'm going to recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake again. I believe she has an amendment, so I think we should get that on the floor.

Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, you have an amendment? I believe you've sent me the original. Would you give your copies to the page to be distributed?

Mrs. Leskiw: The minister was supposed to have them.

The Chair: Oh, they're at the table here. Okay.

Mrs. Leskiw: Are they? Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Would you introduce the amendment and move it, hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Chair, I would now like to move an amendment to Bill 13. This amendment has been tabled and is prepared for circulation to all members.

The Chair: If you could pause, we'll have the pages distribute those, and then I'll come back to you in a brief moment.

For the record, hon. members, this will be amendment A1.

Hon. member, you may speak to the amendment at this time, please.

Mrs. Leskiw: Since the recent Legislative Review Committee deliberation, edits to Bill 13, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2015, have been recommended by the constitutional law section of Justice and Solicitor General's legal services division. To enhance the potential success of the enforcement provision of the amending act being upheld if challenged in the courts, we are seeking a small amendment to Bill 13 as recommended by legal counsel.

The bill is amended as follows. Section 19 is amended in the proposed section 22(1) by striking out "A" and substituting "Except as prescribed, a". It will now read:

Except as prescribed, a fishery officer, for the purpose of ensuring compliance with this Act or while lawfully engaged in the exercise of powers or the performance of duties under this Act or any other applicable law, may signal or otherwise order an individual . . .

This amendment enables the development of future regulations which may be required to support section 22 of the Fisheries (Alberta) Act. Legislative Counsel has advised that these changes can be considered editorial in nature. Making the changes now will help to avoid having to open up the act in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there anyone speaking to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: I'm just trying to follow, Mr. Chair. Sometimes these acts are written and numbered in a strange way. I'm on page 12.

19 Sections 22 to 27 are repealed and the following is substituted:

Power to stop and order movement of conveyances
22(1) . . .

And this says, "striking out 'A,'" "a fishery officer," and then it will say – okay. That's where the "A" is. I was wondering which "A" it was. And then "Except as prescribed." So who prescribes?

The Chair: I'll go to the sponsor, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, if you have an answer.

Mrs. Leskiw: I don't quite understand your question, sir.

Mr. Mason: Well, it says that except as prescribed, the fishery officer can make you stop, right? If it's prescribed, he can't. So who prescribes, and what is the prescription? I'm just not following this. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. I'm going to have to get back to you on that one, sir.

Mr. Mason: Okay.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Just to assist the member, it looks like if you look at page 3 in the explanatory notes, it has things like "prescribed waters." It basically means waters prescribed by regulations, so I'm assuming it would be the minister that would prescribe in the regulations.

It looks like if you look at page 4 of the bill, it has the definition of "prescribed" under subsection (1.5), and it defines "prescribed" to mean

- (i) . . ."prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council" means prescribed or otherwise provided for by regulations made by the Lieutenant Governor . . . and

- (ii) otherwise, means prescribed or otherwise provided for by regulations . . .

So it means regulations or whatever the Lieutenant Governor provides by regulations.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. So my understanding, then, is that this just allows, with regulation, to put limits on when the fishery officer can make you stop your boat. So he just can't sort of show up in your pond and pull you over.

Ms Blakeman: In your koi pond?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Whatever. Okay. Good. Thank you very much for that clarification.

The Chair: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: I want to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for assisting in answering that from a lawyer's perspective.

The Chair: Are there other speakers on amendment A1? Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're now back to the bill as amended. Speakers on the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess the one question that we have when reading this act is that it appears that a fishery officer may without a warrant enter a place to which a licensee applies, yada, yada, yada. So I guess my question is: should there be some protections to landowners or individuals? You know, if this fishery officer can just come into your place without a warrant, would the hon. member think that there should be some type of reasonable and probable grounds to kind of come onto your land and check for these mussels and stuff?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Leskiw: I can answer this one. First of all, let me answer some of the questions that some of the members had posed yesterday. The Member for Drumheller-Stettler had a few questions regarding Bill 13 that I would be pleased to address. The member had questions about mitigating concerns regarding the new inspection powers under sections 25 and 26 of the bill. Inspection powers under 25 and 26 do not apply to any private dwellings. This is clearly outlined in the proposed section 28.02. In fact, if you look on page 15 or 17 of the bill, it definitely explains what they can and cannot do.

5:30

I would also point out that under section 26(2), an official may only inspect places if the official has reasonable grounds to suspect that the place or conveyance may be carrying an invasive organism. These reasonable grounds are clearly outlined in section 27(1) under the heading Power to Search. Overall, inspection authorities will be similar to other enforcement powers. There will be no nonlegislated people with authority.

There were also quite a few questions regarding the inspection program and the implementation, which I would be happy to touch

on. The member had questions regarding station locations, something that one of the other members had asked. Where possible, inspection stations will be located in existing Alberta facilities; for example, commercial vehicle scales.

The member also questioned about specialized equipment. The inspectors themselves require basic equipment for carrying out inspections, and the decontamination of watercraft can be performed at a weigh station.

Members had questions about how the inspection stations will be staffed and costs. There's a commitment to ensure that this program is successful, so I understand that there will be seasonal staff at 11 stationary inspection station sites as well as three roving crews.

The member had questions about minimizing the impact to traffic. Inspection stations are located along major highways throughout the province, which will allow boat traffic to move off the highway and not impede the traffic.

As for the member's question around the use of organic treatments, those are not available at this time, which contributes to the large concern that aquatic invasive species pose, specifically zebra and quagga mussels.

The member's final question was regarding the funding that will be allocated to enforcement. I understand that along the funding through existing budgets, creative sentencing options are in place within the Fisheries (Alberta) Act and would allow fines to be directed to the aquatic invasive species program.

So I just wanted to answer some of the questions that various members in the opposition had posed yesterday.

Again, thank you to the member for his assistance in the last question.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Saskiw: Thanks. That does answer my question regarding the enforcement provisions, that it would just be going after a boat or a vehicle rather than being able to enter a dwelling or something like that.

Just generally speaking, I'm curious about where the biggest threat comes from. Is it from the U.S., or is it the mussels coming from the east to the west, or from B.C., the other way? If you have some comments on that.

Mrs. Leskiw: Well, right now in Canada: Manitoba, from Lake Winnipeg, would be a threat. But also they found them in B.C. and in Saskatchewan, so we have boats travelling back and forth. It's important for us to safeguard our waters.

Ms Blakeman: I'm going to apologize to the sponsoring member, because I have a cold, and it's possible that my ears are plugged and that I didn't hear her correctly. But when I look at section 25, it talks about rights of entry and passing over land without a warrant. It reads:

A fishery officer or fishery guardian may, without a warrant, enter on and pass over land for any purpose involved in

- (a) ensuring compliance with, administering or enforcing this Act or any other applicable law, or
- (b) ascertaining the presence of any invasive organisms.

That says that they can go on your land.

Powers of entry with inspection, under 26, 26(2) specifically says:

An official may, without a warrant, for any purpose involved in ensuring compliance with, administering or enforcing, or any other blah, blah, blah,

... enter and inspect any place or conveyance.

Conveyance is mostly on wheels – that's a boat, trailer, car, motorhome, whatever – but any place: that would include going into your cabin, walking over your land, looking in the garden shed. So I don't understand. I think I heard the member say that they wouldn't be able to go on private land or to inspect private buildings, and she gave that in answer to someone else's question. Did I not hear her correctly, or am I missing something when I read this?

When you go further into section 27, which she was specifically noting, you end up with the same thing, which is power to search. So you've got rights of entry, powers of entry with inspection, and power to search. Power to search in section 27 says, "subject to the conditions in a warrant or without a warrant," if they believe on reasonable grounds that there might be something that's a "danger to human life or safety or a threat to Alberta's ecology," and it's not practical to get a warrant, they can go on if

- (a) there is anything
 - (i) by means of or in relation to which this Act has been contravened, or
 - (ii) that will afford evidence of a contravention,

or any activity or any invasive organisms. That to me reads like: yahoo, go crazy. They can enter onto, they can inspect, and they can search, which seems to pretty much cover from (a) to (c).

So if I can get a clarification of that, I would appreciate it, and then I have some additional questions.

Mrs. Leskiw: If you take a look on page 17, 28.02, places and conveyances limited under section 28, no private dwellings. Stop. So it cannot. Then if you go back to section 25, you're talking about fishery officers and fishery guardians may without warrant. It would be just like having a checkstop and requiring the police to have to get a warrant for every car that they search while they were at a checkstop, which doesn't happen.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: This is one of these little family arguments that you get into, like gun registries and laws on guns. So it's kind of an uncomfortable place for me to be. My father calls them the Fish Feds. I suspect he's not going to be happy about this, but I don't know how not happy he's going to be. And he really follows the law. So I'll have to check that out and get back to you in third reading.

I am appreciative of the list that is attached in the back of the bill, on pages 32 and 33, which actually lists all of the invasive species. For most of them the conditions to actually bring them in are that they have to be dead or dead and eviscerated. That's pretty clear. It does list some 25 different species, including the tubenose goby and the ruffe and the western mosquitofish. It also talks about freshwater dwelling invasive plants, and wouldn't you know it? The one plant I've managed to get to grow would be the yellow flag iris, which is now on the prohibited list. So I guess I'll be getting a shovel out on that one. Fair enough. If they're the ones that – you know, invasive species are always the ones that sort of grow exponentially, and they tend to take out everything else that's usually part of the ecology. But just dang. Wouldn't you know it?

So I will make sure that I talk to my father about what his concerns might be with this act – it'll be a long discussion – and I will get back to the sponsoring member in third reading. But other than that, my colleagues are supportive of this. Yeah, really supportive of it. You know, you can't fool with Mother Nature because this is what happens: she'll get you.

Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:40

Mr. Mason: Thanks. Just one question. In the section that was just amended, it gives the fishery officer the power to basically stop any conveyance, move it to a particular location and stop it. I looked at the definition of “conveyance,” and that is in (c.2), on page 2 of the act. “‘Conveyance’ means a vehicle, being a device in, on or by which an individual or thing may be transported or drawn, and includes” trailers, aircraft that are not in flight, watercraft, docks and wharves, and railway cars. So this would seem to indicate that the fisheries officer can stop trains and move them around. I wonder if this is in conflict with the federal railways act.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, do you have a comment?

Mrs. Leskiw: I’ll have to look into that. I’m not sure, sir.

The Chair: Other questions?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the bill as amended?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 13 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. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: I wonder if I might move, Mr. Chair, that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 16 and Bill 15. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 13. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 12 Common Business Number Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Denis]

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

Mr. Oberle: I move second reading of Bill 12, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: It’s been moved.

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has already spoken. You had some time left. Did you wish to continue, or are you finished your comments?

Mr. Quest: No. Mr. Speaker, I’ve moved second reading. Unless there are any questions, I have nothing more to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I’ll look for other speakers. Are there other speakers at second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Just to indicate that there is support from the Liberal caucus and without amendments. Yippee. Yahoo. This is going to help our small and medium-sized businesses with some of the red tape. The Common Business Number Act, I’m sure, will be very welcome by that community, which is the community that generates and hires the most people in the country, contrary to what most people think.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other speakers? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think it’s a good thing because we support the development of customer-oriented services for businesses in Alberta, and that includes developing a system of common business numbers between the federal and provincial governments.

Mr. Speaker, with this bill we see that the government is finally catching up to something many other provinces already have, most notably Manitoba. Manitoba’s NDP government brought in a similar system a number of years ago. Again, the pattern is repeating itself, the PCs in Alberta just being a few years behind the NDP in Manitoba. That seems to be a real theme here. If we were to be elected in the next election, we wouldn’t have to wait several years. We’d just, like, get it done and get on with things. I note that the text of this bill is almost word for word the same as an equivalent bill that was passed in Saskatchewan in 2013, and I guess the Saskatchewan Party follows the NDP in Manitoba, too. It’s a shame, I think, that it took so long, but fortunately the government has at long last decided to get on with it.

While it’s important to modernize government operations to support businesses in Alberta, privacy, convenience, and flexibility must be respected every step of the way. In section 2, for example, the minister can enter into an agreement with the government of Canada to establish a system of common business numbers. It’s rather vague like much of the act. It’s important that the government should be up front with Alberta’s businesses about how the system will be implemented. Specifically, will the common business numbers be the same as those used by the Canada Revenue Agency? I think that’s something that should be clarified for businesses in this province.

There’s a similar lack of clarity in section 4, which, for the purpose of establishing a system of common business numbers, enables any public entity to share business information with any agency of the government of Canada. So my question is: why is such broad permission required if communication is really only needed between the province and the Canada Revenue Agency?

Section 4 also enables a public entity to require information from a business entity in order to assign a common business number. It then also allows the public entity to provide this information to the

government of Canada or to one of its agencies. The public entity may also use the information currently in its possession for this purpose. Given the extent of the information sharing there must be adequate systems or regulations in place to ensure that business information is used only for the purpose of assigning a common business number.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, section 4 creates the sanction that any public entity may refuse to act on information provided to it by a business entity should the business fail to provide the information necessary for the system of common numbering. So if a business does have legitimate concerns about the privacy implications of this information sharing, why shouldn't it be able to opt out, then, without a penalty?

Section 4(3) requires that business information be provided "in any form or format that the public entity considers appropriate." Whatever that format is, it must not place an additional burden on the business. Preferably, businesses should have the option of providing information in different formats depending on what's best suited to their needs.

Section 4(5) and section 5(4) require that the business information received by public entities be provided to the minister. There are no restrictions on the use of this information or direct justification for this clause with respect to establishing a system of common business numbers. If public entities may provide business information to the government of Canada themselves as per section 4, why must the minister receive the information as well? The role of the minister in implementing the system should be clarified.

Section 6 pertains to the creation of an information system for the common business numbers. As per 6(2)(d) the information may hold "any other prescribed information" about the business. This needs clarification. Who will make the prescription? What limitations will be placed on it? Will the information system be expanded or be capable of storing information other than the information set out in section 6? If so, how will the scope of the information system be expanded?

Section 6 also fails to identify where the information held in the information system will be stored and who will be responsible for controlling access to the information other than the minister. We must ensure that these things are clear in the regulations and that such information remains secure.

5:50

Section 7(1)(a)(ii) enables the minister to disclose the information system to a public entity for the purposes of law enforcement. However, given the murky scope of the information to be held by the system, it is disconcerting that it may be used for law enforcement purposes. Businesses must know what information will be held in the information system before being forced to comply with the legislation.

Lastly, section 11 pertains to regulations. Here 11(a) sparks the most concern because it enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council, that is to say the cabinet, to define, enlarge, or restrict "the meaning of any term or expression used in this Act but not defined in this Act." In other words, the government may significantly alter the implications of the legislation without ever having formally to

amend it. Mr. Speaker, one would only have to read *Brave New World* to understand the importance of language in government.

We want to make sure that Alberta's businesses benefit from this bill as opposed to simply handing over more information to the government with less oversight. So with regard to those questions we will be looking very closely at the regulations, and I hope that the comments that I've made will be taken into account. We know that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicated that it does support this as it will make life easier for their members.

I guess those are more or less my comments. I certainly think that when we get to committee, I would like the government to be prepared to answer some of those concerns and also to answer questions about the potential costs of this program. Otherwise, I expect that there will be broad-based support for the bill, Mr. Speaker, and that includes the NDP.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 12. I'll be very brief, just noting that we support the general intent of the bill on second reading and look forward to digging into the details in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other speakers?

If not, then I'll invite the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close debate if he so desires.

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll take everybody's comments under advisement. The intent of the bill was not to collect any more or less information than is being collected today. It's not to be shared. It's more like a key.

Really, as has been stated, it's supported by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. This is a very, very good bill for small businesses. As a former small-business owner I have a pretty good understanding of some of the complexities of navigating and getting information and so on from government. This will make things a lot easier for our small-business people.

I'll close debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

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

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Mr. Speaker, in light of the hour I would suggest that we might call it 6 o'clock and adjourn till 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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