



Province of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 24

The Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 28th Legislature

Third Session

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Hale, Jason W., Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
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Liberal Opposition Whip
Smith, Danielle, Highwood (PC)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W),
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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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Fox	Sarich
Hehr	Starke
Kennedy-Glans	Towle
Luan	

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Amery	Mason
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Fraser	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Great Spirit and Holy Creator, as we begin our deliberations for this week in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, we ask for balanced insight to help inform the decisions we make for the benefit of our province and the people whom we proudly serve. Amen.

Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, which today will be led by Miss Hayley Grundy.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you, Hayley, and thank you for having recently joined our heritage interpreters and tour guides at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta some few weeks ago. Welcome. [applause]
Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Member for Lesser Slave Lake 26th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, 26 years ago, on March 20, 1989, to be exact, one of our esteemed and honourable members was first elected to our Legislative Assembly. In addition to being the longest serving woman to ever serve in this Assembly, a total of 9,500 days including today, this hon. member is also the 16th longest serving of all members in the history of our Assembly. Please join me in expressing our congratulations and our gratitude for her dedicated service to her constituents and all Albertans.

Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, congratulations. [Standing ovation] Thank you and congratulations.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly His Excellency Dr. Bálint David Ódor, the Ambassador of Hungary, who is with us. His Excellency is joined today by Éva Simon, who is the consul of the embassy, and by Alexander Szenthe, who is the honorary consul of Hungary here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I've always believed that cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships with jurisdictions around the globe is a priority for this province, and that's why I'm so pleased to introduce to the Assembly these special guests. They build on a strong relationship that exists between Hungary and Alberta, which includes ties in terms of trade, in terms of investment, education, and culture. I don't think I'm alone in saying to them that there are so many distinguished people in our province and indeed in our

country who are descendants of Hungarians who have come to Canada, so we're proud to have them with us.

Between 2010 and 2014 Alberta and Hungary have benefited from an excellent two-way trading relationship, and Alberta's postsecondary institutions have also been exploring a variety of partnerships with Hungary, everything from language to faculty and student exchanges as well as knowledge sharing. Their visit here today is an important occasion to reinforce our shared priorities. I'm confident that our relationship will continue to thrive and that we will strengthen the excellent relationship that exists between us. His Excellency Dr. Ódor and Mr. Szenthe are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask our honoured guests to receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Let us begin with school groups. Let's start with the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Dorward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right in the middle of the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar is Clara Tyler elementary school. We have grade 6 students here today with their teacher, Mr. Zane Wei, and also parents and helpers Tammi Bexson, Karen Hiebert, and Pauline Gillanders. They're in School at the Legislature this whole week. I'll be dropping in several times for little visits with them. If that group from Clara Tyler, the students along with their guests, could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other school or education groups?

Seeing none, let's move on to other important guests, beginning with the Minister of Service Alberta, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some fantastic community leaders from St. Albert. We're joined today by Suzan and Ward Krecsy and Charlie Schroder. They're sitting in the members' gallery beside Michael Cooper. We've got a St. Albert row up there. If I could ask them to rise while I introduce them.

Our community, Mr. Speaker, is made up of families from all walks of life, and that includes some families in need. Our guests here today are with the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village. The community village aspect as well as the food bank is a service that provides programs, services, and support to assist people to return to a state of independence, personal safety, and an improved quality of life. It's a hand up as well that our food bank provides. Suzan has been the executive director for almost 10 years. Charlie Schroder, the current chair of the board, has served in a leadership capacity for almost that long. Suzan's husband, Ward, after a distinguished career in the military and as the executive director's husband has done pretty much everything at the food bank. I'm so proud to call them friends and to call St. Albert home, and one of the reasons is because of our dedication to the well-being of everybody in the community. These fine folks represent that spirit incredibly well.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyone in the Legislature I would like to provide a special welcome to our guests, and I ask the honoured members of this Assembly to provide them with the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Edmonton-South West, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

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 Legislative Assembly a gentleman seated in the members' gallery that many of us members are familiar with. He's a federal Conservative candidate for Edmonton-St. Albert and has been involved with politics since he was 14 years old as an active member of his local constituency. Looking at him, you may think that was just yesterday; however, he's matured significantly since then. He's currently a lawyer at Ogilvie LLP. It is my pleasure to introduce my friend and future Member of Parliament, Mr. Michael Cooper. I'd ask him to now rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some folks representing an association that has a common professional interest with me, although I suspect that their patients have less likelihood of moaning and kicking. My guests are from the Alberta Association of Midwives, and obstetrics is certainly something that is more than a passing interest in my practice, especially this time of year. I'd like to ask them to rise as I read out their names. My first guest is Joan Margaret Laine, the president of the Alberta Association of Midwives. Joining her today is Nicole Matheson, the vice-president; and also the executive director, Lolly de Jonge. They're seated in the members' gallery.

The association provides midwifery services to over 1,600 Alberta women and their babies annually. [some applause] Yes, exactly. I'm certainly looking forward to meeting with them later. We had a very excellent presentation to our rural health services review from the association, and we're going to continue on that discussion with regard to services to be provided to rural and remote areas of Alberta as well as the rest of the province. Now that they've risen, I'd ask my colleagues to join me in the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fine young Albertan who like many other boys wrote his annual letter to St. Nick before Christmas. His name is William Kendall, and he's sitting in the members' gallery. When St. Nick read his letter, he had his elves send it to me as Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Why, you ask, would St. Nick do this? Well, it wasn't because William asked St. Nick to put a note in his brother's gift for him to be a little bit nicer. I come from a house of three boys; I know that request has been made lots and lots of times. It's because William asked St. Nick to help stop global warming and to help the big cats and for the world to be more environmentally friendly. I have long said, as has the Premier, that Albertans are conservationists at heart, and this is why our ministry takes its mandate so seriously. I would ask William and his proud parents, Chris and Valerie, and William's siblings, Tyler and Katie Kendall, to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Riverview. I understand you may have more than one introduction.

Mr. Mandel: I've got two.

The Speaker: Please proceed with both.

Mr. Mandel: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through to the members of this Assembly members of the Mental Health Patient Advocate office. As many of the members in this Assembly know, navigating the health care system can be challenging for those struggling with mental illness. The office of the mental health advocate works with patients and health providers, serving as an independent investigative body and as a resource for the mental health community. They're here today to see the tabling of the 2013-14 mental health advocate's office annual report. I would ask the guests to rise as I call their names: Carol Robertson Baker, the Mental Health Patient Advocate; Beverly Slusarchuk, patient rights advocate; Ryan Bielby, patient rights advocate; and Lorraine D'Sylva, administrative assistant. I'd like the Assembly to give them the traditional welcome.

Mr. Speaker, again it's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some strong advocates for skin cancer prevention. They're here today to witness the tabling of a very important piece of legislation that will have significant positive impacts on Albertans and future generations of Albertans for years to come. I'm talking about Bill 22, Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act, that will be introduced later this afternoon. I would like to ask each of these guests to rise and remain standing as I call their names. First, we have Raheem Suleman. Raheem is a medical student at the University of Alberta. Next, we have Mrs. Sarah Hawkins, who is a public policy analyst for the Canadian Cancer Society. Also here today is Ms Cathy Gladwin, who is with the Alberta Public Health Association. We are also fortunate to have with us Miss Violetta Ambrozuk, Ms Becky Lynn, and Miss Evie Eshpeter, who are skin cancer survivors. Thank you for joining us and witnessing this today.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two representatives from the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. The EFCL does an amazing job of representing the diversity within our city. With us today are the president of the EFCL board, Mr. Masood Makarechian, and the marketing director and lead for the 100th anniversary project, Nora Begoray. Yes, 100 years of the EFCL. They are seated in the public gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special visitors. With us today are Dr. Brent Saik, and I believe with him there are his wife, Jenelle Saik; and Brenda Saik-Martin. Dr. Saik is the founder and organizer of the world's longest hockey game, which took place at Saiker's Acres in my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park from February 6 to 16 this year: 40 dedicated players, 250 hours on the ice, over a million dollars raised for the Cross Cancer Institute in the fight against cancer. They're seated in the members' gallery, behind me.

I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my very, very best friend and tremendous partner. She has been at my side for over 41 years now, an incredible journey. She is the mother of our three great daughters. I would ask Angeline, who is sitting in the public gallery, to now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That concludes the introductions that were forwarded to my office, but if there are others, I would be able to recognize you to recognize them.

I see none.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two minutes for each statement. Let's proceed, starting with Little Bow and then the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The hon. member.

Agriculture

Mr. Donovan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour today to rise and talk about agriculture in rural Alberta. Agriculture is the backbone of this province and the provincial economy. If not for agriculture we wouldn't have roads, bridges, railways, and a lot of this province would have never been found out and flourished the way it did. Agriculture was one of the first starts to all the stewardship and, in future, to the environmental movement in this province.

It's been a great pleasure to me, under the new management of our Premier, to be able to tour the Harmony Beef plant in Balzac with the minister of agriculture and the Premier to show how important agriculture is in this province. This state-of-the-art, European Union-certified plant will allow Canadian beef, up to 800 head per day, to start shipping all over the world to show how our triple-A beef is nothing but the best.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is Canada's largest beef-producing province. We have 151 feedlots in this province, that have more than a thousand head per feedlot, 1.8 million head per year. Sixty-nine per cent of Canada's feed cattle production is done in this province alone, not to mention the fact that 41 per cent of the national herd is in this province. These are great things that we can be very proud of.

Other things we have that we can be proud of in rural Alberta and agriculture are the 50 million acres that are under crop in this province between crop, grass, forage, and pasture land. We also have dairy production, poultry production, egg production. Even our honeybee keepers do a great job in this province, Mr. Speaker. Potatoes and beets are among some of the other great things that we have in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little biased. As a farmer myself I can't be prouder of what we do in this province for rural Alberta and agriculture. All I can tell you is that it's a true honour to be the MLA for the Little Bow riding, where Feedlot Alley happens to be. As a farmer myself I couldn't be prouder to be part of this Legislature and tell everybody about how great Alberta agriculture and rural Alberta are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member of Calgary-Fish Creek and Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Retrospective by the Official Opposition Leader

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is with all likelihood the last member's statement I will give. It was over 22 years ago that I joined Ralph's team. We were sent here not for a job but to do what is right and to always be a servant to those who elected us. I would hope that despite the political battles I've been a part of, my friends, colleagues, and my constituents will say that I never strayed far from those values.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I have always believed that our role as MLAs is to speak up for those without a voice. There is perhaps nothing more heartbreaking than stories of children involved in prostitution. I am grateful that we passed the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, a first in Canada. I hope someday soon my legislation requiring the mandatory reporting of child pornography will finally be proclaimed. As Solicitor General I brought forward the Amber Alert program, the first in Canada and now right across this fine country. When I became minister of children's services, we passed important legislation to protect drug-endangered children. While I would never have imagined being Leader of the Opposition, the support from Albertans has been truly overwhelming.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is one face who stole my heart, and I will never forget little Aleena Sadownyk, suffering from a rare disease and looking for treatment. I had the honour of meeting the little one and her family just two years ago. All Aleena ever wanted was the energy to dance. Her daddy prayed that he could be her dance partner. Through endless work and advocacy she finally received the treatment that was long overdue. She now has energy and has a bright smile, and she can dance with her daddy. As I fade away from public life, I ask that we never forget the story of little Aleena and how our work in this Legislature can make a difference.

For all the staff who have touched my life, hugs all around. For my family, who have allowed me to follow my dreams, I love you so much, with all my heart. Lastly, to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek and, for that matter, to all Albertans, it's been an honour, and it's been a privilege. Happy trails until we meet again. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Well, in a moment I'm going to turn to the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, but before I do, let me just remind all of you that we have 35 seconds for each question; we have 35 seconds for each answer. I will then interrupt you if you exceed either of those two limits.

With that having been said and a wonderful speech just having been made, let us recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Government Policies

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were three boxes to tick on the government's survey on the budget: hike taxes, slash spending, run a deficit. It's not hard to figure out that hiking taxes has been the Premier's preferred choice for months. He's talked about introducing a sales tax, a sugar tax, higher income tax, higher gas tax, and a tax on everything he can think of. Premier, Albertans are wondering what tax you'll bring in and how much you'll be

taxing them. Can you clarify to the House what your favourite tax is and how much Albertans will be paying for it?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, there are obviously no easy choices in the circumstance that our province faces. The Minister of Finance will deal with this in the coming days. We are all concerned about the loss of jobs in our province and what's been taking place over the last several months. It's something that this government is dedicated to deal with. It's about strengthening our economy. It's about diversifying our economy. It's about all the things that we need to do to make this province stronger. The hon. member will hear in the fullness of time this week the plans that the government has.

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day, another shocking story about our health care system. This weekend reports emerged that a woman in Fort Saskatchewan sat uncomfortably in a public waiting room chair for seven hours while she miscarried a child. It's just one story at one hospital on one evening, but we know it happens all the time. It's absolutely appalling that in a province that spends half of its budget on health care, this continues to happen. Premier, how are we going to address these horrible situations?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our thoughts and prayers go out to the individual this happened to. It was a very sad situation. This government is spending a tremendous amount of money – \$50 million was just announced – investing in our emergency departments and increasing the number of long-term care facilities, long-term care beds. We're making every effort to try to put the system in balance, and we'll continue to do that. Unfortunately, our hearts and prayers go out to that family.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Final supplemental.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. Five years ago this government said that we would have a patient-accessible electronic health care record by this year. It would improve communication between patients, physicians, and specialists, and it would ensure the continuity of patient care. Two years ago Greg Price died because this system still wasn't in place. The Health Quality Council wrote all about it, acknowledging the role it played in Greg's death. Fast-forward to today, and it's still not in place. Premier, this government promised the Price family that this system would be created. Why has it not been done?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak too much about previously, but we are working diligently with a group of people today to put in place the proper computer system that will allow records to be effectively put in place for this province so these things don't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, followed by Livingstone-Macleod.

Premier's Address to Albertans

Mr. Saskiw: For weeks the Premier has been telling Albertans that there is no more money. He made it crystal clear that he has no intention of passing his budget in the House and will instead be using it as a PC Party central campaign platform, which is why Albertans are furious that he is spending over 100,000 taxpayer dollars on a PC campaign commercial. The Wildrose said no to this absolute farce. Premier, will you do the right thing and have the PC Party pay back taxpayers for your campaign ad?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a strong and entrepreneurial and resilient province, but it has been clear for several months that we face serious economic circumstances with the collapse of oil prices, the effect on our public finances and our economy. We see job losses in this province beginning to mount. Albertans want to know where their government stands on this, what their government will do. They need to hear from their Premier. They need to hear about our steps to diversify the economy for a hopeful future, and so they will.

Mr. Saskiw: You don't need an ad, Premier.

Here are the facts. The previous Premier spent \$45,000 to fly to South Africa while this Premier is paying \$100,000 for a campaign ad that includes \$10,000 to write a speech, that includes \$3,000 per minute in production costs, a makeup artist, production directors. The list goes on. Again to the Premier: why on earth would you need to blow taxpayer money right now, before a budget that blames and punishes Albertans for the fiscal mess you got us in?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are a strong province. We face serious economic circumstances. There's not a single person in this Chamber who has not been affected at this point by someone, directly or associated with them, who has lost a job in the province. Albertans want to hear from their government. They want to hear from the Premier. They want to know about help for those who are unemployed. They want to know about the stabilization of our public finances. They want hope for the future, and they want to know what we're going to do to diversify our economy. I intend to address Albertans and speak to them about those issues.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans don't want a TV ad. You made it clear that you do not intend to pass the budget in this Assembly; you'll run a campaign on the budget. So this is \$100,000 in a campaign ad, twice the amount Redford spent to go to South Africa. It is clearly a purely partisan piece of PC propaganda. Again, since taxpayers will receive no benefit, will you do the honourable thing and have the PC Party pay back taxpayers immediately?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, Her Majesty's Opposition was afforded the opportunity to speak directly with Albertans and to share their plan. I think the essence of it is that they do not have a plan. They don't have a plan that will address Albertans relative to the diversification of the economy, how we're going to stabilize our public finances, and what we're going to do for young people and the future of this province. They don't have a plan, so they're not prepared to speak with Albertans. We are.

Mr. Saskiw: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted 30 seconds ago, and it will be dealt with later.

Let's move on to Livingstone-Macleod, followed by Calgary-Mountain View.

2:00

Navigator Ltd.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's cozy relationship with Navigator has been well documented, from the sole-sourced contracts to PC nominations to the backroom, floor-crossing deal that was made in the dark of night out of the Premier's

office. This Premier said that he would do something about sweetheart deals for companies like Navigator in the past, but so far it's been business as usual. To the Premier: to what extent does your ongoing relationship with Navigator influence the business of this government?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier made it very clear when he took on as Premier that we are under new management. He made it very clear that there would be no more sole-sourcing contracts, and we've lived up to that bargain.

Mr. Stier: Well, earlier this month the government promised to spend upwards of \$80 million to upgrade and install sprinklers at all seniors' facilities in this province. It seems like this should have been a no-brainer decision, certainly, but it took extensive lobbying to have the government act on this file, and according to the lobbyist registry it was Navigator that was doing the lobbying. Premier, it's time to start being honest on this. I'll ask you again. To what extent does your continued relationship with Navigator influence the business of this government?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that this government is doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. One of the things that the Premier has us mandated to do is to upgrade our seniors' facilities so they're up to current safety standards. That's one of the main things that I got as a mandate as the Minister of Seniors along with creating more affordable supportive living and renewing our rural lodge program, on which we've taken great steps and expedited. We're trying to do a very good job with that.

Mr. Stier: Well, I was asking about Navigator in that question, minister.

The Premier's excuses simply don't wash. It's clear that the access to the Premier's office is facilitated by the people at Navigator. In return the Premier leans heavily on Navigator for their advice on both party and government business. Records indicate that Navigator is also being paid MSI funds to lobby the government on behalf of the town of Okotoks for the funding of a water pipeline. Now, we all know this pipeline is needed desperately, but Navigator shouldn't be scoring on the deal. To the Premier: why is government money being paid to Navigator to lobby this same government for more government money?

Mrs. McQueen: Mr. Speaker, any MSI grants that are given out are given out without strings attached to municipalities. Municipalities make the decisions on what's most important for their communities, and that's how they use and invest the MSI dollars that are given to them.

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

Privately Operated Seniors' Housing

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During this session the Liberal opposition has spoken a lot about Martha and Henry, the severely normal Albertans mythologized by past PC governments. Today many of those original Marthas and Henrys are seniors, and thanks to this PC government they're being treated as cash cows by private, for-profit seniors' home operators. Public Interest Alberta released today government documents reporting projected profits for Alberta's two major corporate care providers at \$5,500 per bed annually. The same corporations received millions in capital construction grants. To the Premier: why are you padding the coffers

of private care providers while at the same time forcing seniors to pay . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, let me try and clarify. The affordable supportive living initiative in Alberta is a very successful program that leverages government dollars to partner with private and nonprofit resources to create a greater number of spaces. With this year's ASLI, which the member alluded to, we're leveraging our \$180 million taxpayer investment into projects totalling \$850 million. We're building a thousand more beds than we initially projected. We're doing that by partnering, and we'll partner with anyone who can help increase the quality of life for our seniors.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Liberals recently released AHS figures showing the low cost of publicly provided long-term care compared to the high cost of keeping individuals in hospitals. To the Premier again: why are you providing funds to private, for-profit companies instead of investing in public, community-based home care and long-term care?

Mr. Mandel: We're investing in home care, long-term care, acute care. We are trying to ensure that all Albertans get the best care possible. This government has made a tremendous commitment to ensuring that there is a greater investment, as the Minister of Seniors said, in the continuing care continuum. We'll continue to do that as we continue to be effective.

Dr. Swann: One hundred and eighty million dollars wasted every year on in-hospital beds.

The government has been unable to ease the access-to-care crisis due to its failed seniors policy. It recently announced that it would double down on ASLI grants to solve the crisis, which hasn't worked in the past and won't work this time. Why does the Premier, who talks about making decisions based on conservative fiscal principles, insist on subsidizing by millions lower quality, higher priced care?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think the many nonprofit and private providers out there should take great offence at that last comment. They're delivering excellent care to our seniors across this province.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the facts. The facts are that Alberta seniors enjoy the second-lowest regulated accommodation rates in the country. ASLI grants help seed projects in communities that demonstrate need for supportive living, and any unit developed with ASLI money must charge the government-regulated rate for 30 years. So let's be clear. We're focusing on low-cost rent for seniors, that affordable housing piece, as opposed to focusing on who owns the building.

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

Emergency Room Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I released more documents showing the ongoing crisis in Alberta's hospitals. Five years ago this government promised that 90 per cent of the sick would be admitted into Alberta emergency rooms within eight hours. Instead, our numbers show that, in general, people are waiting three times that target, and in some cases people are waiting not hours but days to be admitted to a ward. To the Premier: do you

think it's reasonable for someone to have to wait 71 hours to be admitted to emergency care?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a bit of number-playing here. In the province of Alberta the Foothills, Peter Lougheed, Rockyview, Grey Nuns, Misericordia, Royal Alexandra, and University hospitals all have far less time today than they did five years ago.

Ms Notley: Well, actually, no, Mr. Speaker. Compared to two years ago, everything's gone up a long ways.

Emergency rooms are crowded, they're stressful, and they're not meant to house for days on end people who need to be admitted to the hospital. This weekend we heard about a young mother who miscarried in the emergency room while waiting for care. To the Premier: don't you understand that your government's long-term failure to improve emergency wait times has real-life consequences for the Albertans who depend upon our health care system?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, the latest real data from CIHI show that our emergency access is similar to other provinces or even better. As a matter of fact, the national average is a 3.2 hours' wait, and we're at 3.1 hours. You know, for example, for ages 20 to 64 in emergency Ontario is way higher than we are. So we're doing all we can to continue to build a very, very fine health care system in the province.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the numbers show that it's getting worse here.

Now, over the last two weeks of this soon-to-be-abbreviated session I've asked the Premier 17 questions about the state of our health care system, and he has not risen to answer one of them. So my question, again to the Premier: is your failure to answer these questions because you don't know about health care, you don't care about health care, or is it because you looked in the mirror and decided that somebody else was responsible for health care?

Mr. Prentice: Mr. Speaker, actually, the reason that the Minister of Health has answered the questions is that we have a remarkable and extraordinary Minister of Health.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Children's lives continue to be at risk with this government's lax approach to mandatory choice for school vaccinations. Although the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education both said they believe in vaccines, one has already categorically denied he will make the choice mandatory for school enrollment. Both have said they need more time to consult on what is a clear medical and scientific fact. The Premier is failing to provide leadership for all Albertans on this file by allowing this confusion to continue. Let's try and get some clarity. To the Minister of Human Services: does the government vaccinate children . . .

The Speaker: We'll have to hear from the minister now. Minister of Health, I think you got something out of the preamble.

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'll respond that we've looked at the information. There is a variety of processes and procedures that you can take, and mandatory has not been shown to be the most effective. We need to look at what is the best way to ensure that every child in our school has the proper process for vaccination and there's a proper record in the school for them.

2:10

Dr. Swann: I'll try it again. To the Minister of Human Services: does every child in Human Services, every child in care, receive vaccination? Are they vaccinated?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that many families use the public health clinics when they go to get their shots. We know that. We work with parents at the parent link centres. We provide support to them. We provide them with all the choices to get the necessary vaccinations to protect their families.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the non answer.

Given that we are continuing to see a rise in vaccine-preventable disease and this government only spends 3 per cent of its budget on prevention, given that this government vaccinates children in care, will you do the right thing, Minister of Health, and direct the government to make vaccines mandatory, at least a mandatory choice for vaccines before children go into school?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, we've already answered that question several times. We need to look at what is the most effective way, not just a mandating way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Drumheller-Stettler.

Employment Skills Upgrading

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current low price of oil has led, unfortunately, to major layoffs in our oil and gas industry. Our province is expected to lose 31,000 jobs by the end of 2015. Generally during a tough fiscal environment people need to return to school to build their new skills for the upcoming good times. That is why we need to have the government help. My question is to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. What steps has our government . . .

The Speaker: We'll have to hear now from the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member talking about layoffs, and I can tell you that two big concerns of this government under new management are people without jobs and jobs without people. When there are layoffs, we encourage employers to work with the federal work-sharing program. We have programs to help underrepresented groups in the workforce such as youth, aboriginal people, and women. We work closely with the federal government on the Canada-Alberta job grant. There is more work to be done, and I can assure the hon. member that we will keep doing it.

The Speaker: First supplemental. The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how much funding is currently available to assist out-of-work Albertans to get training during these tough times?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, on an individual basis, for example, on the Canada-Alberta job grant there's up to \$15,000 per person out of work either to get trained for a new job or get upgraded for a better job, out of which the government pays two-thirds, up to \$10,000, and the employer pays up to \$5,000. That's just the one program. There are several thousand Albertans that

have already qualified for this, and we have other programs, which I'd be happy to talk to the hon. member about at his leisure.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. Given that it is important for Albertans to have access to retraining and stay longer in school in these tough times, what efforts has our government taken to work with our postsecondary institutions to meet the training and learning needs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Ed.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud that our postsecondary institutions offer many opportunities for Albertans looking to retrain or upgrade their skills, and our goal is to make the system as accessible as possible. In addition to traditional learning at one of our 26 institutions, the Campus Alberta system has a wealth of flexible online learning programs and opportunities. There are more than 900 online courses and 70 programs offered by our postsecondary institutions. This includes academic upgrading for provincially approved certificates, diplomas, and applied degrees. Albertans also have access to financial support. If you apply for a student loan and you qualify, you'll get one.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, followed by Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has approved spending millions of taxpayer dollars on a golf course while Albertans are still waiting for DRP relief. Last week the minister said that the government will be reviewing this situation, but the money has already been approved, and millions of dollars have already been spent. Minister, will you take this boondoggle off the backs of taxpayers?

Mr. Prentice: Well, Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concerns about this. This is not an appropriate time to be expending public dollars on rebuilding a golf course. No additional spending authorities have been given since December of 2014. The Kananaskis golf course rebuild is under review, and no further public dollars will be devoted to this purpose without further notice.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills at 2:15, following that last exchange.

Let's move on to the first supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The government has just handed over \$5.4 million of taxpayer money to a company with close ties to the PC Party for this golf course, but you claim that only \$2.3 million has actually been spent. Will you make this contract public so Albertans can see what you are doing with their tax dollars?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. There has been that amount of money paid as part of the contractual obligations to an operator as a result of doing the maintenance on the upkeep of the assets that are there and the contractual obligations for a lack of funding. The additional money has been used to do the flood cleanup as the result of the flood. As the Premier has indicated, there will be no more public money going to the rebuilding of this golf course.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, it's been in supplemental supply and estimates.

The Premier has a tough time settling on priorities, whether it's an \$18 million golf course or \$10,000 for speeches and makeup sessions. This Premier is wasting taxpayers' dollars just as he's about to bring down record tax increases. Minister, will you hold off on spending any more taxpayer dollars on this golf course until you close every last DRP claim?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier was quite clear just a couple of minutes ago that there will be no more money going towards this project. It is under review, and we will make sure that in this time of fiscal restraint the priorities of Albertans are reflected, and we are ensuring that there will be no more money going towards the rebuild of this golf course.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, your point of order was noted during that last exchange, 30 seconds ago.

Let's move on.

Bighorn Sheep Harvest

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, recently the Department of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development announced plans to change the hunter harvest of bighorn sheep in Alberta. The proposal is to require horns of harvested rams to have a full curl instead of a four-fifths curl. This has raised concerns from hunters, big-game outfitters, and taxidermists, who may be affected by the potential lack of harvestable animals. All of my questions are for the Minister of ESRD. Can the minister tell the House why the change is being proposed?

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to be very clear that we are reviewing this as a potential change to the hunting regulation and that no decision has been made yet. However, there are concerns that have been brought forward by hunters and outfitters and the like regarding the quality of trophy rams in this province over the years. Analysis of over 30 years' of data supports these concerns that overharvesting is occurring and the quality of trophy rams in our province in Alberta has been decreasing.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister say what scientific evidence there is that such a change, if it goes ahead, will result in better trophy size?

Mr. Fawcett: The harvest of trophy rams, Mr. Speaker, is exceeding the 5 per cent target for rams of this size to survive the posthunting season, which is not sustainable over the long term. Biologically, there needs to be some mature rams left in the population to ensure a healthy age and size class structure for this range to succeed over the long term.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister assure hunters and outfitters and others affected that there will still be a sufficient number of animals available for harvest in the initial years if this change did go ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These proposed changes to the hunting regulations will reduce the harvest of trophy sheep in the short term and will allow for fast-growing rams to reach maturity prior to being harvested. We are in a process of ongoing consultation. We will continue consulting on this issue, and this will

result in a review of the bighorn sheep management plan as well as habitat studies regarding sheep resiliency. We'll continue to make that data available publicly so that we're transparent about any decisions that are made.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed Edmonton-Decore.

2:20 Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As far as I can reckon, the Alberta government's main strategy for climate change has been prayer. At the time I observed that the '08 strategy was back-end loaded; in other words, not much done now but much hope and prayer that something, anything, maybe some technology, would appear toward the end that would save them. My question is to the new minister of climate change. No one but this government has ever believed that the '08 strategy would achieve reduction targets. What has changed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, with responsibility in this area.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has actually achieved its targets in a number of ways. Just to give you a couple of examples: wind has increased from 1 per cent to 9 per cent; conventional coal has decreased from 52 per cent to 39 per cent. Today more than 45 per cent of Alberta's electricity generating capacity comes from alternative and renewable energy sources. Total flaring has decreased by 10 per cent. Solution gas has decreased by 13.5 per cent. I could go on – and you're waving me off – and I will in the next question.

Ms Blakeman: All right. The government has always diminished and obfuscated on climate change by basing reductions on a business-as-usual scenario rather than the start date and by using emission intensity to measure change rather than the actual reduction of emissions. So will this new, perhaps old strategy of the government please stop using these two mystifying terms?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, Alberta has established, as we know, a carbon price that has led to a cumulative reduction of 51 megatonnes and a contribution of \$500 million to the climate change fund. We've invested \$1.3 billion and will invest \$1.3 billion in carbon capture and storage, which alone per year will reduce emissions by 2.7 million tonnes. We are committed to slowing growth of emissions while protecting the economy. We set realistic targets, and that is why we are renewing our climate change strategy to meet our 2020 targets.

Ms Blakeman: Well, in 2012 you produced 249 megatonnes, so I don't know that getting rid of 50 is going to make that much of a difference here.

You know, in the past I've heard the Premiers and the climate change ministers complain that there is really nothing they can do while Albertans continue to drive cars because what comes out of the tailpipes is far worse than what comes out of the oil sands. Now, is the minister planning to achieve climate change targets by making it the commuters' problem?

Mrs. McQueen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member: stay tuned as we renew our climate change strategy. We'll be

looking at a variety of measures in order to meet the 2020 targets. We'll be doing this. If you think about this, our population has increased by 1 million people between 2002 and 2015, and we have a strong economy, which this government is responsible for making sure that we protect while meeting our reduction targets.

Seniors' Care

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it is important to me that all seniors live in situations of dignity, with needed supports, and my questions are to the Minister of Health. Given that two years have passed since the move to give large firms the contracts for providing home care and given the controversies surrounding that change, to what extent will the Legislature be receiving a comprehensive review of the results and the effectiveness of the major change in home-care service delivery to seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'll make it clear that this wasn't a major change in the way we do home-care delivery, and we've always contracted providers delivering nonprofessional services such as personal care and assistance with their medication through individuals. What changed two years ago was that Alberta Health Services went through a request for proposal to make home care more efficient and cost-effective by consolidating and standardizing services. I am pleased to note that home-care spending has grown by 26 per cent. We have 112,000 individuals on support right now, and we are putting together a program which we can give . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, and we'll probably hear more in the first supplemental.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that a recent study by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, CIHI, shows that the \$506 per capita cost of seniors' care in Alberta is 19 per cent below the Canadian average of \$625 per capita and given that there is a clear and substantial shortage of long-term care beds for seniors, will the government be increasing the per capita seniors' care spending to the national average in order to fund more long-term care beds for seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Mandel: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, first of all, we spend about \$2 billion per year in continuing care. We've announced, under the Minister of Seniors, tremendous expansion to the continuing care program, which in itself and by itself requires a tremendous increase in investment in our seniors. Furthermore, in Alberta 12 per cent of our population are seniors; other areas of the country are at 15 per cent. So you need to put those numbers in balance, not necessarily on a per capita basis but with the number of seniors, so that you put them in the proper perspective.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the current care and accommodation standards established by Alberta Health give facilities eight weeks' notice of inspections and given that such notice may undermine the very purpose of such inspections, will the government ensure a policy of regular and unannounced inspections of all seniors' care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mandel: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Our goal is to make sure that seniors are receiving safe, appropriate care, and that includes ensuring that facilities meet our standards. My ministry and AHS formed a continuing care audit working group. They're hard at work thoroughly reviewing continuing care audits and assurance functions, including the practice of giving facilities notice. I do agree that we need to do this on a very individual basis and go there without any notice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by Red Deer-North.

Kananaskis Country Golf Course (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Premier's last-minute, pre-election change of heart, in the last year the provincial government has already spent \$5.4 million on the Kananaskis golf course. Given that the Minister of ESRD has said that the money is justified because, quote, the grass has to be kept nice and given that he should have added, "Nice for the Tory insiders operating the golf course, who are being subsidized through a sweetheart contract whose terms are being kept secret and which was awarded despite other bids being superior," to the Minister of ESRD: will the minister immediately make public the terms of the secret backroom deal, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier has been very clear on this. We will not be spending any additional funds on the rebuilding of this golf course. It doesn't fit within the fiscal priorities of the government at this time. You know, we do have the contractual obligations with the operator that operated this golf course prior. We have to keep those contractual obligations, but as far as rebuilding the golf course, we will not be putting any money towards that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister refers to the contractual obligations of the government, but he dodges the question as to whether or not he will make public the terms of the contract. Will he or will he not make it public, and if not, why not?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, it's very clear. This project is under review. We're reviewing all of the legal obligations and necessary obligations of the government. There was considerable damage there as a result of the flood. It has required that the government do some cleanup like it has everywhere else that was impacted by the flood, and that work was conducted. As the Premier said, it's under review, and right now it doesn't fit within the financial priorities of this government.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister completely dodged the question for a second time, let me ask him this. The supplementary estimates are going to be passed, or they'll have passed third reading by later today, which means the government can always spend the money, if it chooses to, after the election. Will the minister or the Premier undertake to repeal that section of the supplementary estimates so that the government does not have the authority to spend the money?

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier has been very clear in this Assembly and to me as the minister that there will be no

additional expenditures on this particular project until a review has been conducted and we understand the realities of the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

Eye Examinations for Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children with undiagnosed visual impairments often have serious challenges learning to read, the foundation for all learning. Children with undiagnosed visual impairments usually suffer a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, further impairing their ability to learn, and in many cases develop behaviour problems in the classroom and the schoolyard. To the Minister of Education: given that comprehensive eye exams are one of the best ways to diagnose visual impairment and that the government covers the cost of these exams for children to the age of 18, how supportive are you of having every child receive a comprehensive eye exam prior to grade 1?

Mr. Dirks: Well, Mr. Speaker, kindergarten students may take part in the Eye See . . . Eye Learn program, a very important childhood eye health and vision awareness program funded by Health. Educational materials to support school staff in the identification of possible vision problems as well as information for parents about the importance of eye examinations are available through this program, and free eyeglasses are provided to children who require them.

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: given that studies have shown that children with undiagnosed visual impairments often require additional supports in the classroom and are unable to learn to their full potential, what is your ministry doing to ensure that all parents and guardians are aware of the importance of comprehensive eye exams prior to grade 1, where learning to read begins?

Mr. Dirks: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. We support our colleagues in the Ministry of Health to ensure that possible vision problems are identified in children and students as soon as possible. However, Education does not regulate parental choices, including those related to child health. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn program requires parental consent, and participation is not mandatory. However, during the '11-12 school year 44 per cent of Alberta five-year-olds completed eye exams. This collaborative partnership between Health and Education is a good example of working together to inform parents.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the Minister of Health: given that the government already covers the cost of comprehensive eye exams for all children up to and including the age of 18 and that fewer than 44 per cent of all children starting grade 1 have received a comprehensive eye exam, will our government continue to be committed to funding comprehensive eye exams for 100 per cent of all children prior to grade 1?

Mr. Mandel: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. I deeply believe that if we don't have our children's eyes examined before they go to kindergarten or at least in their early years, tremendous problems can happen, so we are committed in Health to ensuring that every child has an eye examination, working with the optometrists' association to make sure that's done. We need to be more creative in how we do this. We need to be more

proactive in making sure children get this. This is very, very important.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by Calgary-Bow.

Privately Operated Seniors' Housing (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Public Interest Alberta released freedom of information documents detailing the government's policy of funding private corporations to provide seniors' care. Of all the disturbing information in this document, of which there was plenty, the numbers speak the loudest: \$36.5 million to private corporations, 27 per cent profit, and average profit of \$5,500 per year per bed. To the Minister of Seniors: what is the upside of providing such exorbitant profits to friends and insiders of your government?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to those numbers. I think there's a fair bit of homework to be done before you could disclose those kinds of facts out to the public. That's certainly not what we're seeing, but let me tell you what we are seeing. We are seeing that it would have taken \$850 million of taxpayer funding to produce all the units that we just produced with the ASLI grant, and we did that with \$180 million of taxpayer funding. That's good news for seniors.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that companies can expect to make \$5,500 profit per bed – those numbers are good – and given that the money could do a whole lot more to raise the quality of care in the facilities for seniors, hiring more staff, having better ratios for health care staff, better quality of food, to the Minister of Seniors again: wouldn't the money that we invest in seniors' care be better spent in nursing care and other services that seniors need rather than thickening up these companies' profit bottom lines?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I think a couple of things are important to consider. One is that that \$5,000 a year is coming off potentially a unit that cost that private provider \$300,000 to build, so you can do the math on what the return is there. The other thing that's important to know as a taxpayer is that those units are secured for 30 years at discounted or rebate rent accommodation prices, and those accommodation prices are the same whether it's in a private facility or a nonprofit or government-owned facility. So we're actually spending less to build the building but securing the exact same operating costs for 30 years.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that many Alberta seniors and their families are struggling to find quality seniors' care and given that the government has given millions of dollars in profits to these for-profit corporations, not just for the set-up but also for the building of these structures as well, to the minister: finally will you stop the practice of outsourcing public health care to the private sector, save our province millions of dollars, ensuring our seniors are not paying for the profits of PC friends and insiders?

Mr. J. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the member heard me, but I'll rephrase it. Seniors who are staying in these facilities are paying the same price regardless of whether this facility is run by a private or whether it's run by a nonprofit like Covenant Health or the Bethany Group. These folks are doing good work. This is about making sure that seniors can age in place and age in their communities and with their spouses and with their families in the communities they helped build, and we can only do that if we build

more facilities. By partnering with privates and nonprofits, we've been able to build a lot more facilities. Taking care of the seniors is what this is about.

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

Flood Mitigation on the Bow River

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2013 floods were the worst natural disaster in the history of the province. Tens of thousands of Albertans were forced from their homes. Hundreds of businesses were shut down, including downtown Calgary. In the aftermath the government began negotiations with TransAlta to create an agreement for use of their dams to minimize the impacts of major flooding on the Bow River. Lowering water levels at the Ghost dam prior to flood season would create storage for incoming floodwaters, yet despite negotiating for almost two years now, there's still no agreement in place. To the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development: are we close to an agreement with TransAlta that would allow their . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister of Environment and SRD.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to providing protection to flood-affected communities. Leveraging TransAlta's existing infrastructure is one of the more immediate and effective options that is available. We continue to work on an agreement with TransAlta that builds on the pilot project that we had with them last year on the Ghost reservoir. Although the focus this year is to get that immediate flood protection in place for the community for this flood season, we are continuing to work with them on a longer term agreement on water management along the Bow River.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: given that sediment buildup over time reduces the storage capacity of dam reservoirs, is TransAlta committed to maintaining the reservoirs so that there is adequate room for flood water during future events?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A survey to measure the water depths and assess the reservoir bed has been partially completed at the Ghost reservoir. This will address the question of storage loss due to sediment infilling and the impact of lower reservoir levels on fish habitats. If there is an opportunity to reshape the bottom of the reservoir to provide more storage capacity while not negatively impacting the fish habitat in the reservoir, we will pursue that option.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: why were three dry dams, initially considered for construction above the Bearspaw dam on the Ghost River and across Waiparous Creek, not recommended for detailed study?

Mr. Fawcett: These three dams that the member is alluding to, Mr. Speaker, were investigated as part of the initial assessment of flood mitigation options. They were rejected because they would not provide the acceptable levels of flow reduction because of either their location or the size of the reservoir. Although those locations

did not pan out, we are continuing to explore other locations in combination with the work we're doing with TransAlta to try to maximize the level of protection we can provide for communities that are affected by the Bow River.

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

Legal Aid Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Justice make the business case for me in which an NGO which provides a legal assistance program is underfunded to the point that judges order counsel to be provided at full cost? Can he make that business case for me, please?

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect, I reject the premise of that question. We're funding legal aid, if that's what she is referring to, adequately. We have given a 5 and a half million dollar additional stipend this year, and we continue to ask the federal government to pay their share, as they once did.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister: can this minister explain why he has implemented a number of changes to cut down on court time and court costs but, at the same time, a group which offers lower cost legal resources, which saves the government money, is resolutely underfunded?

Mr. Denis: The same answer.

The Speaker: Hon. member, final supplemental.

2:40

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Legal Aid has two revenue sources, government and the Law Foundation, which is interest off of trust accounts. They incur the expense, but they can't control the revenue. At the same time, we have more people in Alberta and more laws under which people can get into trouble. So to the Minister of Justice: whose fault is it if Legal Aid runs a deficit?

Mr. Denis: The same answer.

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

Police Officer Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a ceremony in the town of Mayerthorpe marked the 10th anniversary of the killing of four Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers. The event elicited a variety of emotions: grief, respectful remembrance as well as optimism and hope. To the Justice minister: in the 10 years since this tragedy, what lessons have been learned and what recommendations have been implemented which have come out of the fatality inquiry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concern as a former police sergeant with the Calgary Police Service. What happened in Mayerthorpe 10 years ago was a sobering reminder of the inherent dangers that our police and peace officers face every day, and indeed one of them lost is one too many. As reported in the public fatality inquiry by Assistant Chief Judge Daniel Pahl, "There were no failings in the training, experience or abilities of the officers who lost their lives." I've been

to the monument honouring the Fallen Four in Mayerthorpe, and I encourage Albertans to go.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that we have very recently witnessed the St. Albert tragedy, in which another officer lost his life and another offender with a significant criminal history was walking the streets, what is this government committed to do in order to prevent such a tragedy from happening in the future, and what are their plans to revisit the bail reform initiatives from 2008 and 2009?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the first things that I did when I learned of the tragedy of Constable Wynn's death in St. Albert recently is that I ordered a review of the Alberta Crown prosecution service involvement with the shooter. This review remains under way. We all know that any aspect of this case could have been handled differently. If we can find that out, we want to prevent and ensure best practices to ensure that this does not happen again and that his death is not in vain.

Mr. Ellis: Given that many incidents of officer-involved deaths were perpetrated by individuals who had a history of violence or a current history of being before the courts, in 2009 this government introduced bail reform, which was intended to put more police officers on the street and put the role of the hearing officer back in the hands of the Crown, but this initiative was shelved. To the same minister: when is the government going to reopen this reform initiative with stakeholder consultation and provide a better, safer service for citizens intended to prevent such past tragedies and not allow public perception of the administration of justice falling into disrepute?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in the last exchange, the review is looking specifically at the Crown's involvement in this case, and I expect that it will look at the bail process in general to some degree. That being said, it's my expectation that if this report identifies that more work needs to be done in reviewing the bail process in more detail, this work will be undertaken as well. As, again, this is a fully independent review, I will make it public when it is available to me, but it's too early for me to speculate on next steps, and the review is not expected likely for the next few months. I wish to thank again the member for his inquiry.

The Speaker: The bell for question period has sounded, so we will move on to the continuation of Members' Statements, and we will do that in 30 seconds from now.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Let us begin. We have two minutes allotted for each of these statements.

We'll start with Strathcona-Sherwood Park and go to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

World's Longest Hockey Game

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to rise today again and recognize the 2015 world's

longest hockey game, held February 6 through 16 at Saiker's Acres in Strathcona county. The founder of the game, Dr. Brent Saik, and his team once again organized an incredible event that raised over a million dollars for the Cross Cancer Institute and the fight against cancer. The proceeds from this year's game are directly supporting the purchase of a PET/MR scanner. The device will produce extremely detailed images of cancer in its earliest stages and provide invaluable information for research and care. This will enhance our doctors' ability to deliver the right treatments at the right time while cutting patients' radiation exposure per scan in half.

This year's game was an unequivocal success, once again setting a new Guinness world record. Mr. Speaker, 40 brave players spent 10 days on the ice, each player skating for about 4,200 minutes, which is equivalent to two nonlockout NHL seasons. During this time more than 1,200 smokies, 1,000 hot dogs, and 2,000 cups of coffee were purchased and consumed, raising another \$17,000 for the cause. Eighty-one volunteer referees kept score, as well as the peace, while 50 volunteer massage therapists and 20 nurses ensured that weary muscles were kept moving; 2,100 rolls of tape kept sticks on the ice and pads to shins while 4,220 goals found the twine. What we get when we add these numbers up is an incredible display of generosity, grit, and determination.

I would like to thank all of the participants, volunteers, and all those who helped make this year's world's longest hockey game the best event yet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let us move on to Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by Calgary-West.

Ernest Côté

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to acknowledge Mr. Ernest Côté and thank him for his contributions to Alberta and Canada. He recently passed away at the age of 101.

Members may recall that Mr. Côté was our veteran of the Second World War who made national headlines after being tied up and robbed in Ottawa. What most people do not know is that he studied law at the U of A and classical French at the Edmonton Jesuit College. In 1939 he joined the Royal 22nd Regiment as a lieutenant. On June 6, 1944, he landed in Normandy, responsible for the logistics of the third division of the Canadian infantry. Seventy years later he returned to commemorate their arrival.

What most do not know is that in 1993 Mr. Côté donated cash to U of A's Campus Saint-Jean, establishing bursaries awarded to students studying there. He revisited the campus only a few weeks before his death. Also, Mr. Speaker, only a few years ago he spoke at the 75th anniversary of Jean Côté, a small community in my constituency of Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley. He was there to celebrate and remember his roots and his father, Jean-Léon Côté, who gave his name to Jean Côté. Mr. Jean Côté was a surveyor, a mining engineer, an MLA here in Alberta from 1909 to 1923, and then a Senator, appointed in 1923.

I'm very proud to have had met Mr. Ernest Côté, who left his mark on Alberta, Canada, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and as a Canadian ambassador to Finland. We lost a man of tremendous leadership and courage. He was a true role model for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Police Officer Deaths

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member knows the importance of our front-line emergency services. In regard to the law enforcement officers who carry out their role under federal, provincial, or municipal jurisdiction, each of these courageous individuals has made a commitment to protect Albertan lives.

With this commitment comes risk, risk that not every person is willing or able to take. They are the chosen few who respond to situations in which their actions are sometimes unappreciated, but their split-second decisions can mean the difference between life and death. Often berated, police officers put their lives on the line to make sure that our lives are protected. Police officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives in the line of duty provide a stark reminder of the ongoing and ever-present dangers they face.

As a former police officer myself I would like to read the following poem, anonymously written, which humanizes the consequences of their job.

I have been where you fear to be,
I have seen what you fear to see,
I have done what you fear to do,
All these things I have done for you.

I am the man you lean upon,
The man you cast your scorn upon,
The man you bring your troubles to,
All these men I've been for you.

The man you ask to stand apart,
The man you feel should have no heart,
The man you call the man in blue,
But I'm just a man, just like you.

And through the years I've come to see,
That I'm not what you ask of me,
So take this badge and take this gun,
Will you take it? ... Will anyone?

And when you watch a person die,
And hear a battered child cry,
Then do you think you could be,
All the things you ask of me?

There should be no higher honour than that given to those men and women who give their lives in the line of duty. Their actions should never be forgotten.

I will be working with Alberta Justice in an attempt to reform the judicial administrative process to ensure that tragedies such as Mayerthorpe and St. Albert never happen again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:50 St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and acknowledge some very special guests we have joining us today. Joining the hon. Member for St. Albert today are some guests doing great work in his constituency. On his behalf I welcome Suzan and Ward Krecsy and Charlie and Marilyn Schroder with the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village. The St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village provides vulnerable people in the community and surrounding area with free services so they can return to a state of independence and an improved quality of life. It's the compassion and community dedication shown by people like the Krecsys and Schrodors that make Alberta such a fantastic province to call home.

We are pleased to support food banks in St. Albert and my constituency of Stony Plain and all across the province. Organizations such as the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village help to empower vulnerable Albertans to achieve their full potential. Some of the services that are provided include liaison work connecting individuals and families to the appropriate social services. That includes accessing housing and food, family violence prevention, and employment services. The best way to measure a society is by how well they treat their most vulnerable citizens. That is why food banks like the Parkland Food Bank have recently received CIP funding.

Mr. Speaker, we are dedicated to ensuring that public support is available to Albertans, but we need the ongoing dedication of community members like our guests here today as well. It will take both the government and community working together to ensure that all Albertans have access to the services they need. I want to thank our guests here today for their dedication to the betterment of St. Albert and the surrounding area. Their work has made a difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Bill 22

Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act.

This new legislation would ban businesses from providing artificial tanning services to minors, prohibit advertising of artificial tanning directed towards minors, mandate health warnings in artificial tanning facilities and on advertising materials, and prohibit unsupervised self-service artificial tanning equipment in public places. Research shows that using tanning equipment before the age of 35 increases the risk of melanoma skin cancer by 59 per cent. Every Albertan, especially our youth, should be able to enjoy a life free of preventable cancers.

I would like to move first reading of the skin cancer prevention act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that pursuant to Standing Order 75 Bill 22, the Skin Cancer Prevention (Artificial Tanning) Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 24, being the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the Government House Leader had, I thought, waved to you, but in actual fact he was waving at himself. So I hesitate to interrupt, but let me recognize the hon. Government House Leader first.

Mr. Denis: First off, Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the unanimous consent of the House to continue the Routine past 3 p.m., pursuant to rule 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We will conclude the Routine when it concludes post-3 o'clock.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, actually, I would also like to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to waive the notice required by Standing Order 39(1)(d) to allow the introduction of Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: On that note, we will now move to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Bill 24

Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act

Mr. McIver: Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker. I now request leave to introduce a bill, being Bill 24, the Public Sector Services Continuation Repeal Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, if passed, would repeal the Public Sector Services Continuation Act, which was passed in December 2013 but was never proclaimed or put into force. Government is currently in the process of exploring new models of public-sector legislation to ensure that the essential services Albertans rely on are provided. New legislation will align with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding labour legislation. Repealing the Public Sector Services Continuation Act is a first logical step in this developmental process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: We'll start with the Minister of Health, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Mandel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the five requisite copies of the Mental Health Patient Advocate office annual report for the year 2013-14. This report was submitted to me in accordance with the provisions of section 47(1) of the Mental Health Act. The report is entitled We're in This Together: Compassion, Hope, Help. It highlights how the Mental Health Patient Advocate office protects the rights of persons in accordance with the Mental Health Act and the patient advocate regulation. The office of the Mental Health Patient Advocate opened 2,050 new files in 2014-15. I'm very proud of the important work they have done over the years, and I'm pleased they were able to join us today to see this report tabled in the Legislature. I would like to thank them for their continued work in supporting some of our society's most vulnerable populations.

The Speaker: Let me move straight on to Edmonton-Centre, followed by Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ms Blakeman: I regret, Mr. Speaker, that I was overly optimistic about tablings today. I'll try for tomorrow.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Let's go to Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of 26 different letters written by my constituents and Albertans struggling with Lyme disease. They highlight how our current system leaves many Albertans jumping hurdles as they seek help and answers for their illness. They are truly heart-wrenching stories.

I thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an analysis conducted by the Holy Spirit Catholic school board on how a 5 per cent cut would affect education quality. This analysis found that two schools within the district would have to be shut down. It also found that 32 full-time teaching positions would be cut in addition to nine support staff. We at the Alberta NDP stand with teachers and students in this province. I table this analysis with hope that the government will realize the real damage that cuts like these would do to Alberta's future generations and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary Shaw, I understand that you have two tablings. Please proceed with both.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise with two tablings today. The first is a letter by Ian and Rita Campbell. Ian is a cancer survivor, and the family stopped by my office and wanted to discuss the importance of moving forward with the cancer centre in Calgary. I have the requisite number of copies of that.

I also have a letter here by a grade 11 student in my constituency, Ms Syameena Pillai. She is the president of Student Voice at Centennial high school and wanted to submit a letter about her thoughts around the implications of potential cuts to education.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, followed by the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to table a document, including the appropriate five copies, a paper that was signed by approximately 540 concerned citizens of Berwyn, Whitelaw, Bluesky, Grimshaw, Brownvale, Fairview, Peace River, and the surrounding areas opposing the closure of the North Peace Housing Autumn Lodge in Berwyn. Certainly, they are very concerned about the closure of that particular lodge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, I want to table the requisite number of copies of the letter to St. Nick from the young Albertan that I introduced today. I'll read it real quick. It'll take 30 seconds.

Dear Saint Nick,

Hello!! How are you? How are your Reindeer? Since I have learned that you only give 1 gift, not that I'm complaining, I will give you 3 things to choose from appropriate to my goodness:

1. to put a note in my brother's Gift that will tell him to be a little nicer.
2. to stop Global warming and help save big cats.
3. for the world to be more environmentally friendly.

Sincerely,

William Kendall.

And then he writes,

P.S. I would prefer #2 or 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table five copies of an e-mail received in my office from the Alberta Association of Optometrists supporting my private member's Bill 206, the Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act. The e-mail states: "In response to your request, the Alberta Association of Optometrists has reviewed the draft Private Member's Bill 206, 'Childhood Comprehensive Eye Examination Act' and has no objection to the optometric provisions within the Bill."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the town of Whitecourt supporting Bill 203, the Safety Codes (Sustainable Structures) Amendment Act, 2014, and what a great bill that was, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice, followed by Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to table five copies of an article by CBC news, March 17, 2015, in which one of the leadership candidates, Linda Osinchuk, for the Wildrose Alliance Party talks about, "moving from fakers and takers to the makers," and indicates: "We should be looking at selling bonds, Alberta bonds. And we can actually use this to create revenue." Those are actual quotes. Actual quotes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by Stony Plain.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has been recognized, and she does have the floor. Let us give it to her with grace.

Carry on.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, of which I have five copies of each. Would you like me to do all three in a row? Just go one after the other? Thank you.

The first tabling I have is New High School, New Name from the *Fort Saskatchewan Record* on Thursday, March 19. The new high school that is proposed for Fort Saskatchewan has a new identity and new name. St. André Bessette was chosen for the name of the Elk Island Catholic high school, and it's going to open adjacent to the Dow Centre.

My next tabling is not such good news, Mr. Speaker, and that would be a news report that was on Global on March 21 about a local Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville constituent who had to wait seven hours in a hospital waiting room. I'm certainly concerned about the triage and the grief that that particular patient went through. That should not happen to anyone else, and we need to see that change.

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is recognizing Carole Bossert, who is a teacher at James Mowat elementary school in Fort Saskatchewan, for her work in creating a program that links seniors and grades 4, 5, and 6 students together. That appeared on Thursday, March 19, in the *Fort Saskatchewan Record*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the requisite number of copies of a news release from the Alberta Forest Products Association, in which the president says: “This is great news for the forest industry and for Alberta’s economy.” Naturally, he’s talking about that great bill, Bill 203.

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

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of two tablings. The first tabling is a search under the consultant lobbyists registration entitled CL0128, and it states that the lobbyist there is Navigator for the sprinkler systems.

The second tabling, with the requisite copies, is a search from the consultant lobbyists registration dated March 11, 2015, and it is with respect to the lobbying for certain infrastructure in Okotoks. It clearly states that Navigator is the registered lobbyist.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Mandel, the Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2013 annual report; pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we have three points of order to deal with now.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: The first one was raised, I believe, just around 2 p.m. by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, so if you would please proceed with your citation and your point.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), and it is with respect to a comment made by the Premier in reference to a hundred thousand dollar campaign ad that taxpayers are paying for. He had indicated that the reason for the Wildrose not participating in this, what I would call, farce of wasting taxpayer dollars was that the Wildrose had no plan.

Mr. Speaker, this is categorically untrue. Not only do we have a very robust plan, some of the most substantive policies of all the political parties – you can check it out at www.wildrose.ca – but we do also advocate for things like lower taxes, decentralization of health care, protection of property rights, formalizing a process to lower power bills, and, of course, freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience. We have policies on essentially every single ministry.

Of course, on this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, it was the Premier’s chief of staff that approached our party, and we made it very clear that the reason we were not participating – it was made very clear to the Premier’s chief of staff – was because we felt that it was a waste of taxpayer dollars. The Premier should have been made aware of this, that that’s the reason why we rejected wasting taxpayer dollars like that, not according to the reason that he had provided.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, we could dig into this a little bit more tomorrow. If the Premier is not willing to clarify his statements, we can keep digging on this. But we made it very clear what the reason for not participating was, and he has misled the Assembly in indicating why we didn’t participate.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s almost terrible that this member continues to use this type of language when he knows that you can’t have a point of order on a point of order. I’ll just leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at what the text of 23(h), (i), and (j) says:

(h) makes allegations against another Member.

The Premier didn’t do that.

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.

That didn’t happen either.

Third,

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

He didn’t do that either.

Mr. Speaker, it’s a statement of opinion, not fact, when someone says “we have a plan” or “we don’t have a plan.” That is a fair comment. This member talks about free speech – and I’m with him on free speech – but this is one of those cases where you can accept, respectfully, two versions of the same facts. I’m sorry. I don’t have the *Beauchesne* citation that you often indicate.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I hope there’s no one else on this. It’s a very straightforward point. We frequently hear different accounts of different things, and the House has been reminded many times that *Beauchesne* 494 is quite applicable, and I’ll quote briefly.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted.

And it goes on and says:

On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I believe the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has clarified his side of this. I see no point of order here, nor do I see the need to allow us to engage in any further debate on the point of order.

So that closes that matter.

Point of Order Appropriation Process

The Speaker: We’ll move on to point of order 2, and that was enunciated at approximately 2:15 p.m. It’s again the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, so please proceed with number 2.

Mr. Saskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll actually combine the second and third points of order together. I’m rising according to Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j), and, actually, in this case (l). This is in regard to a question from the Official Opposition with respect to the Kananaskis golf course. In response to those questions both the Premier and one of the hon. ministers indicated that they would not be proceeding with spending any more money on that particular topic.

3:10

Why this is interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that in the Legislative Assembly we actually passed legislation in supplementary supply that indicated that money would be spent on that golf course. So you have an instance here where the Premier of Alberta under the

Executive Council of government is overriding the will of this Assembly. These members across the aisle voted in favour of allocating money to the golf course, and now the Premier is stating that that money will not be used. That, again, is overriding the will of this Assembly. It's similar to points of privilege, actually, that were put forward previously in terms of overriding independent committees. This is even one step further, I would submit. Versus a delegated committee from this Assembly, he's actually overriding the entire will of this Assembly.

Perhaps the proper recourse would be a point of privilege here, where the Premier has overridden the will of this Assembly that has specifically stated that monies will be spent for a golf course. Now, if he is, by his own whim, ignoring the entire will of the Assembly, ignoring legislation that was passed, that would be improper, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that that be clarified or that we give notice that a point of privilege will be called tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, if this member wants to call a point of privilege, please, go right ahead and do so.

I went to dictionary.com on my BlackBerry, and it talks about estimates. "To form an approximate judgment or opinion regarding the worth, amount, size, weight . . . [or] calculate approximately". And then it goes down to say: "The department will use the estimates for budgetary purposes." That's the first definition.

Now, this member had referred to Bill 17 and Bill 18. I have a copy of them in front of me, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't talk specifically about a golf course here. But the point here is that even if it did, the estimates are just that. What happens when a department doesn't spend the money? They're not obliged to. They're just authorized to. When I was minister of housing I would routinely return money back to the treasury. There is not a requirement under the Standing Orders or *Beauchesne's* or anywhere else that this go back to the item here.

This might be more of a point of clarification, but there certainly is no point of order here. If this member wants to make a point of privilege, he is at liberty to do so as a member of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, unfortunately, I'm forced to agree with the Government House Leader with respect to this point of order. There is no compulsion on the part of the government to spend money that is budgeted for.

The parliamentary process is that the Legislature or the Parliament must be consulted to gain approval for the taxation and the expenditure of funds, but it is not something that is then mandated when the Legislature votes certain sums. That is why in my question today I asked for the government to repeal the approval of the \$8 million because my fear, of course, is that as soon as the election is over, they will spend this money. That's why a repeal is the only answer. The point of order just doesn't do the trick, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Well, once again here, I hope there is no one else wishing to chime in to take up the time, but if there is, I'd recognize you briefly. I see no one, so let's move on.

I would agree that this is simply a matter that is frequently characterized as being a dispute as to the facts. We know what estimates are. We've been here. We've been through this, some of

us for many, many years. Estimates are in fact estimates, and they're titled that for a reason. It does not oblige the government to follow through necessarily. It provides, perhaps, a guideline or however else you might want to interpret it. But at the end of the day if a government wishes to change its mind about something that it's been directed to do or requested to do or has in its estimates to do, then the government is certainly at liberty to do that. It's within their purview to do so.

Accordingly, I find there to be no point of order on this matter, but I do thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for clarifying his statements on it once again and for rolling the two together to save the House some time.

On that note, we can move on.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 204

Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014

[Debate adjourned March 16: Mr. Ellis speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, I believe you still have eight minutes. If not, we can pass it over to someone else. I would be happy to recognize Calgary-Glenmore in that case, and then we'll bounce back and forth with opposition members who may wish to participate.

Hon. member, you have the floor.

Ms L. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to you about Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. My focus today is to explain what distracted driving means and how this impacts a person's ability to drive, which can ultimately lead to accidents.

As I begin, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. The traffic safety amendment act would enhance the Traffic Safety Act by proposing that monetary penalties be increased from \$172 to \$250, with a penalty of three demerits for every offence.

The Traffic Safety Act, introduced in 2007, was the first strategy of its kind in Canada. The legislation was introduced due to the significantly high number of collisions, deaths, and injuries on Alberta's roads. Since the implementation of this plan the number of traffic fatalities has declined. In fact, over the past four years the loss of life has decreased by nearly 32 per cent.

As drivers we all know that distracted driving can be a very dangerous act. Alberta is known for our harsh winters, with our often terrible road conditions, and after a large dump of snow driving collisions peak. We also experience very unpredictable weather in all regions of our province.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that distracted driving is dangerous and that in just five seconds someone can die, whether immediately at the side of the roadway or hours, days, weeks later, and the impact to loved ones, co-workers, and the community is large.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Individuals know that it is illegal to use a phone while driving, whether for texting or writing e-mails, and it is even illegal to talk while using your phone as a speaker. But we Albertans are clever, and no matter what the excuse some of us may give, we know that a distraction from the road is dangerous. What I do believe is that

as drivers we too often assume that the distracted driving mistake will not happen to us, and we underestimate the profound effect driver errors have on others.

Bill 204 will amend the Alberta Traffic Safety Act, encouraging drivers to stop looking at their laps and to focus on the road. Alberta has done an exceptional job with increasing awareness and improving safety on our highways. In 2004 Alberta suffered 387 fatalities due to the improper actions of drivers and distracted driving. In 2006 these fatalities rose approximately 20 per cent, to 453 fatalities. In 2007, the same year the Alberta traffic safety action plan was implemented, 458 collisions and fatalities occurred, unfortunately another year of increases.

Five years ago this month, in 2010, my family was impacted when we lost a family member as a result of a traffic fatality. It was a wonderful spring day when my mom and dad went for a drive along highway 822. Unfortunately, an accident happened, and the vehicle they were in was T-boned, and three days later my mom was no longer with us. The impact was felt not only by our family in Alberta, but friends and family in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, British Columbia, and Ontario were soon receiving the news that Helen had passed. While I am not alone in this Assembly in having lost a family member to a traffic fatality, we all feel, we all hurt, and we all want to work to make our roads safer. [some applause] Thank you. Life goes on, and daily, when I witness careless and distracted driving, I honour my mom and remind myself of the importance of paying attention behind the wheel.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that in the following year, 2011, the number of fatalities did decrease in Alberta to 344. While this number is still staggering, Alberta is slowly seeing improvements. In any given year the number of people killed on Alberta's roads is equivalent to the population of an average elementary school. If Bill 204 is passed, it will help keep Albertans safe on the roads and reduce the number of fatalities.

3:20

To date Alberta's fatalities from distracted driving have not risen since the low recorded in 2011. The fact that the numbers have improved is a good indication that the reforms of the Alberta traffic safety action plan are working. Unfortunately, though, we are seeing a trend up and that distracted driving is getting worse than in the previous years. Bill 204 would continue with the work that the province has set out to combat distracted driving.

Safe roads Alberta has done an incredible job with their campaign Crotches Kill. The posters, radio spots, and other advertisements were impossible to miss. These posters featured the all-too-familiar picture of a driver looking down at their lap while operating an automobile. The ad campaign had an impact, to lower the number of distracted driving offences that were committed in the last year. While the ads were offensive to some individuals, they did get the attention of the target market, and Albertans are talking more about the dangers of distracted driving.

Another agency concerned with distracted driving is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In their practices distracted driving is a form of impaired driving since a driver's judgment is compromised when they are not fully focused on the road. Their campaign states that every time a person texts, they take their eyes off the road for five seconds, which is too often the cause of fatalities on our roads. So let's count here, Madam Speaker, five seconds: one one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand, four one-thousand, five one-thousand. If each of us were driving, how far did we just travel?

A study conducted by the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators found that in 80 per cent of collisions the driver had looked away from the road three seconds prior to the crash. Even when drivers use a hands-free device, they are less aware of the

traffic around them as they tend to react more slowly to a critical event or, worse, they do not detect the danger at all.

Madam Speaker, Alberta's roads can be dangerous no matter what the season, but they are particularly bad during the winter months. Can you imagine the effect the added danger of poor road conditions has on a distracted driver when they are three times more likely to be in a crash than an attentive driver?

Bill 204 will support the Alberta government's efforts to stop distracted driving. Although everyone is well aware of the dangers of texting while driving, it also needs to be mentioned that cyclists are also subject to distracted driving laws. While cyclists are not operating a motor vehicle, they are on the same roads and therefore can cause harm to themselves and others when disobeying the law. Cyclists have to follow the distracted driving laws also.

Distracted driving legislation states that it is illegal to read any printed materials or electronic devices; use of hand-held phones, speaker phones; programming a GPS; personal grooming; watching digital screens; having an animal sit in the front seat; reading; writing. All kinds of activities are distracted driving.

Madam Speaker, the foundation has been laid for ending distracted driving in Alberta, and it is clear what changes need to be made to improve the system. When Bill 16 was passed, there was a drastic change for the better on Alberta roads; they became safer. Unfortunately, five years later distracted driving is back on the rise and a leading cause of collisions and fatalities on our roads. Bill 204 will help make the next necessary changes required for Albertans to be safe on the roads once again.

Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, would bring safety back to our roads, so please join me in supporting this bill to move forward. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Today I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing forth Bill 204 for debate. He has proven to be an important advocate working towards safer roadways across our province.

Madam Speaker, if passed, Bill 204 will amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for persons accused of distracted driving. Currently Alberta experiences one of the lowest fines for distracted driving in comparison with other provinces in Canada. Since the introduction of distracted driving legislation the fine for distracted driving offences has been only \$172. It is the opinion of many RCMP officers that this fine has not done enough to improve the statistics of distracted driving incidents on Alberta's roadways. Widely supported by Albertans, Bill 204 would introduce demerit points for each distracted driving offence plus an increase in fines. Each offence will be met with a monetary penalty of \$250 plus three demerit points issued on a person's driving record.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that current distracted driving legislation does not dramatically reduce the incidence of distracted driving. Today 90 per cent of collisions are believed to be caused by driver error. Distracted driving continues to be a major issue that must be addressed to ensure the safety of all Albertans. In 2004 there were a reported 387 fatalities due to distracted driving in Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The RCMP have promoted various suggestions which we can use to avoid distracted driving while operating a motor vehicle. Before you drive, it is suggested that you know your route before you begin

your trip. Preprogram your trip if you're using a GPS system. Better yet, have your route memorized. The RCMP have also suggested allowing yourself plenty of time to reach your destination. If you are not rushed, you are less likely to be distracted by the time or the pressure to arrive. In addition to presetting your GPS system, it is also in the driver's best interest to preset all seats, mirrors, climate control, and radio stations.

Mr. Speaker, the RCMP have also recommended that teaching your children these simple tasks while they are first learning to drive can further their discipline and knowledge of distracted driving immediately when they receive their licensing. Bill 204 would be a deterrent to younger adults developing habits of distracted driving because the repercussions of an offence would be relatively high, further incorporating better driving habits at a young age that will stay with them through their adulthood.

Other recommendations by the RCMP for lowering your chances of driving while distracted are to secure loose objects so they do not roll around your vehicle, becoming a distraction, nor will you be tempted to reach for them while you're driving. Also, prepare your children with everything they need by giving them larger items to play with instead of small ones. Secure pets properly in the back seat. If they are moving around in the vehicle, they can easily become a distraction or a physical barrier for the driver's line of vision and ability to manoeuvre the vehicle. Finally, turn off the alerts on your phone so you're not tempted to check your texts and your e-mails. The RCMP continues to communicate to the public on what they see and hear every day regarding distracted driving behaviour and ways in which they can prevent it.

Mr. Speaker, last month was Distracted Driving Month, and Alberta RCMP officers joined together to increase distracted driving enforcement in an effort to raise awareness and educate Albertans on the various risks it imposes on not only themselves but the general public. The goal was to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injury crashes caused by distracted driving. Sundre RCMP Sergeant Jim Lank said that there is a need to change the public attitudes and values towards distracted driving; everybody, to some degree, is not complying with this law, and that is a huge traffic safety issue.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 speaks to all RCMP officers across the province and supports them in their efforts to reduce fatalities caused by distracted driving. Other RCMP officers have been quoted as saying that the problem is that society has become so dependent on the use of their mobile phones and other portable devices that there is a very low compliance rate.

Mr. Speaker, how do we increase the compliance of Albertans? Bill 204 would be a big step in the right direction and can work towards decreasing the number of fatalities seen by front-line RCMP officers in our province. According to an Alberta RCMP press release, since distracted driving came into effect on September 1, 2011, there have been over 60,000 distracted driving charges laid by Alberta RCMP officers. There were 23,913 convictions alone for distracted driving committed on roads patrolled by Alberta RCMP.

If a vehicle is travelling a hundred kilometres per hour, it travels a distance of approximately 30 metres per second. Alberta RCMP state that during a three-second glance at a cellphone, that vehicle travelled almost a hundred metres, or 270 feet. The three-second glance equates to a hundred metres at a hundred kilometres per hour, which is more than enough to get into a serious collision.

Mr. Speaker, these kinds of collisions occur across the country every single day. In many communities it has overtaken impaired driving as the leading factor in vehicle collisions. Bill 204 would

help to establish an increased deterrent for distracted driving in an attempt to further protect Albertans on our roadways. Distracted driving is a major issue, and we must begin to realize that campaigns are not going to be enough to implement the change we need in order to reduce the incidences of distracted driving and fatalities caused by it. It is in our power to implement legislation that will further protect all Albertans and serve as a catalyst to improve driver behaviour. We must consider implementing measures consistent with our neighbouring provinces to make our roadways safer for all who use them.

Distracted driving continues to surpass alcohol as a factor causing road deaths, and the public is still unaware of how dangerous cellphones are behind the wheel. It is important for the public to realize that distracted driving does not only include cellphones; it includes anything that you voluntarily do in your vehicle to prevent your utmost attention to operating your motor vehicle.

I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-East as we continue to debate Bill 204, and I look forward to hearing from our remaining members that wish to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. The hon. member has proven time and time again what a passionate advocate he is for safe and responsible driving.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. The record shows that you spoke already, so you can't speak again.

Ms DeLong: Aw.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies. I didn't check the list.

With that, I'll recognize the next speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Quadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and participate in this wonderful bill, Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the hon. member bringing this bill forward. I feel grateful to stand and speak to you about the serious topic of distracted driving.

Bill 204 proposes to amend the Traffic Safety Act in order to combat distracted driving on Alberta's roads. Alberta was not only one of the last Canadian provinces to legislate a law against distracted driving, but it was the only one of those few not including demerit points with their fine. Today we get one step closer to realizing this change. Bill 204 will not only increase the already existing fine of \$172 to \$250, but it will add a penalty of three demerit points.

Mr. Speaker, distracted driving is one of the most dangerous offences on the road today, and people do not seem to realize the dangers associated with it. We must do the responsible thing by influencing the driver to stop committing this crime. Bill 204 supports those initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, my focus today will be on the importance of adding the line "a person who is guilty of an offence under section . . . 115.3." It is evident from what we have heard here today that many distractions exist to draw attention from the driver, but cellphones clearly represent the most popular form of distraction. An estimated

1 in 4 car crashes on the road today involve cellphone usage. Hands-free technology is incredibly popular today, and it is often the go-to for drivers who don't want to be ticketed for talking or texting while driving. However, new technology can be just as dangerous as using non hands-free devices as your brain still remains distracted from the road for the conversation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes increased penalties in section 158 of the Alberta Traffic Safety Act. Section 115 pertains to prohibited actions while driving a vehicle and using a hand-held Global Positioning System. Section 115.3 outlines a number of prohibited activities that will become subject to stiffer penalties under this bill.

Mr. Speaker, most if not all drivers use navigation devices to get around on the road today. Although it is a blessing, it is also a curse. The incredible technology market has taken our world by storm, and it has become so blatantly difficult for us to keep up with the ever-changing technology. Yes, we need to continue to use those great new advancements to help us navigate through life; however, we must not forget the importance of staying safe.

Distracted driving involves so much more than just texting behind the wheel; it has also to do with many activities you are performing while you're driving. Focus should be on the road. The only true solution to this problem is to put your phone or any other devices that may distract you away when you're driving.

Section 115 specifically outlines the provision when operating a Global Positioning System, or GPS, while behind the wheel.

Section 115.3(1) reads: "Subject to this section and the regulations made under section 115.5, no individual shall use a global positioning system navigation device . . . while driving."

Section 115.3(2) states:

An individual may use a global positioning system navigation device while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway if the system

- (a) is programmed before the individual [gets behind the wheel], or
- (b) is used in a voice-activated manner.

The use of a GPS is not illegal as long as they are programmed before an individual starts to drive or if it's voice activated, not hand held.

Furthermore, section 115.3(3) states:

If a global positioning system navigation device is portable, an individual may use the system while driving or operating a vehicle on a highway if, in addition to the requirements of subsection (2), the system

- (a) is not held in the individual's hand, and
- (b) is securely affixed to the vehicle in a manner that does not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle.

3:40

Alberta has some of the most dangerous highways in Canada. The fines should reflect this, and increasing the penalty for distracted drivers should be a priority. Albertans need to start putting their phones and GPS devices away before they start driving on our roads. Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to feel safe on the road, and I feel section 115.3 is an important inclusion to the Traffic Safety Act.

Alberta's current fine of \$172 is the only penalty. When comparing it to the rest of Canada, where any driver can receive it when they are convicted of this crime, it is evident that Alberta is in need of new legislation regarding distracted driving penalties. Bill 204 will ensure that the fine is increased, and if a person commits a more severe offence behind the wheel, they will be appropriately fined for it.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that distracted driving is an issue for every province in Canada, not just Alberta. All other Canadian provinces have already taken these dangerous acts into serious consideration

by legislating tougher laws. Today the lowest fine in Canada is in Newfoundland and Labrador at \$100. However, even with it being \$72 less than Alberta's apparently steeper fine, it is still a much greater penalty in that this is the lowest fine of an incremental schedule that peaks at \$400 and also includes three demerit points. With Alberta being one of the only provinces that do not enforce the demerit points, places like Newfoundland have a higher penalty because they have demerits and monetary fines.

Section 158(5)(b) in the bill proposes to include three demerit points in accordance with the current regulations. Mr. Speaker, there is no question that having demerit points attached to the fine is not ideal; however, it may be the best solution for Albertans. By enabling law enforcement to assign demerit points, this penalty will no longer be just a nuisance but an offence that will affect driving records, creating a long-lasting effect. If so many Canadian provinces have not needed to increase their fines, then maybe they are doing something right by utilizing the demerits as punitive measures. Adding three demerits to the current penalty will provide a long-term solution for those offenders who are unaffected by the current fine. Distracted driving will decrease with substantial numbers, forcing the dangerous drivers off the road.

Mr. Speaker, increasing the penalty under section 158 of the traffic act. . .

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing forward this legislation about distracted driving so that we can discuss this important and, I dare say, sometimes life-and-death topic. We all know that the legislation would increase the \$172 fine to \$250, but what most people really need to pay attention to, I believe, is that it would cost offending drivers three demerit points.

Mr. Speaker, the current legislation applies to all drivers of motor vehicles and bicycles within the province of Alberta, and while the existing legislation is a deterrent to distracted driving, the addition of demerits would add significant teeth to the legislation. That's the word on the street that I've heard. Our government takes all traffic issues seriously but none more than the preventable plight of distracted driving and the sometimes mortal results.

Distracted driving is a serious problem in our society, that has been exacerbated by the ease with which we can access media and communications on our hand-held devices. Cellphones have become such a prominent part of our lives that we use them literally everywhere, including using our phones in inappropriate circumstances, times, and places such as while operating a motor vehicle.

The current legislation prevents drivers from doing a number of things while driving, including using hand-held cellular telephones, texting, e-mailing, using electronic devices, entering information on GPS units, reading, writing, personal grooming, watching a TV screen, and having a pet sit in the front seat of a car. As you can see, many things can distract drivers, but I do want to point out that cellphones are one of the more serious distractions, and here's why, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, statistics show that cellphone use while driving increases a driver's chance of an accident far more drastically than other distractions. A person who is texting on a cellphone is 23 – that's right, 23 – times more likely to have an accident, while someone who is talking on a cellphone is four to five times more likely to have an accident. Those are very serious numbers. Non cellphone related activities also increase a person's chance of an accident, with both reading and applying makeup – I

don't know how often that applies to you, Mr. Speaker – increasing the odds by three times.

Regardless of what is distracting drivers, the most important point is that it harms and sometimes kills Albertans, and it can occur on a daily basis. That's simply unacceptable. According to Alberta Transportation distracted drivers are three times more likely to be in a crash than attentive drivers. During 2012 around 130,000 collisions were recorded on Alberta roadways. One hundred and thirty thousand. Property damage collisions represented almost 90 per cent of this total while over 10 per cent were nonfatal injury collisions. Fatal collisions accounted for .2 per cent of the total reported collisions, and while that percentage is relatively small, it does add up to – get this – 307 lives lost, almost one every day on average, due to traffic collisions in our province.

Alberta Transportation estimates that as many as 30 per cent of all accidents are caused by some form of distracted driving. While traffic accidents are something we can't necessarily stop, at least not at this point in time in human history, distracted driving is something that we can make great strides to reduce.

I think it's important to understand the types of people that actually drive distracted. This isn't opinion; this is based on study, Mr. Speaker. There are many myths about distracted driving, but one I'd like to address is that this is solely a problem with our youth. Here's why. We looked into it, and we found that Ottawa's Traffic Injury Research Foundation, or TIRF, conducted a study of the number of accidents that occurred from 16- to 19-year-olds and compared them to accidents from those that are 20 years of age and older. They found some surprising results. The detailed study describes the ways in which distracted driving impacted 16- to 19-year-olds, but it overlooks important points, mainly that the number of distracted driving related fatalities among people older than 20 was actually significantly higher than in the range of the youth. But let's be very clear. This is a problem for everyone of every age group.

3:50

In 2013 researchers at the University of Alberta released a statistical analysis about texting and driving. It's good to have information from here at home. Using data months before the implementation of the 2011 distracted driving law – so this goes back a bit now – researchers determined several characteristics of people who appear to top the risk scale by using cellphones while driving. The results are shocking to some. Men actually outnumbered women by almost 10 per cent in phone use while driving. The largest proportion of offenders in both groups fell in the 35- to 44-year-old age category. The majority of mobile users had completed postsecondary education, again a surprise to many, and among income brackets the lowest income earners had the lowest level of cellphone use while driving. I don't think any one of us can be pointing any fingers on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Rates of use increased with each income category. Fascinating. Those earning over \$100,000 a year were the top users, or, shall we say, abusers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this study paints a much different picture of who uses their cellphone while driving than some might expect. Some have made the point that current legislation does not go far enough and suggest that for those folks who can afford the inconvenience of a \$172 fine, well, the law is just meaningless. If that's the case, the demographics who most likely are driving distracted are likely unfazed by the current fines, and if that's true, more action is needed to prevent drivers of this demographic from driving distracted. Highlighting this demographic today allows us to recognize that this is not just a youth problem but applies to everyone in Alberta and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes more stringent actions. Why? To prevent injury and death from distracted driving. By adding a three

demerit penalty, Albertans may in fact be less inclined to use their cellphones while driving. That's what this is all about. While penalties are an important part of keeping Albertans safe, education is also needed. We need to prevent our loved ones, including the next generation of Albertans, from driving distracted, and it's important that we also target older demographics because, of course, they're role models for the youth of our province. If adults set a proper example early, we can help to end distracted driving in our province altogether.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for his dedication to keeping Albertans safe. It's been an honour and a pleasure to discuss this topic and also to hear the debate surrounding this really important issue.

I do look forward to hearing the rest of my hon. colleagues discuss this topic, and, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your incredible attention to this ever-important topic.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Stony Plain, you have one minute in this segment.

Mr. Lemke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to debate Bill 204, Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. This bill is an excellent demonstration of that advocacy, and I'd like to use some examples from elsewhere in the country. The Ontario Provincial Police reported that in 2013 57 people lost their lives to impaired driving and 44 to excessive speed, but 78 were killed as a result of distracted driving.

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

It is shocking that distracted driving is responsible for the majority of deaths in car crashes. Indeed, it has been found that 75 to 85 per cent of motor vehicle accidents are the consequence of distractions of various sorts, yet here in Alberta distracted driving is among the least punishable driving offences. This is disproportionate to the gravity of the situation, as I'm sure you all agree. Given the frequency of car accidents resulting from driver distraction and especially given the severity of consequences ... [Mr. Lemke's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Bill 204.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, all hon. members who rose to speak to Bill 204 on both sides of the House. As discussed, the goal of Bill 204 is to reduce distracted driving on Alberta roads by increasing the fine from \$172 to \$250 and three demerit points. This would position Alberta as one of the provinces with the strongest distracted driving fines. Bill 204 proposes a strong deterrent for distracted drivers and would spark a societal change in how distracted driving is treated by Albertans. Distracted driving is no longer acceptable, and these new measures reflect that.

Madam Speaker, incidents of distracted driving have gone up in recent years, with some Alberta police officers calling it worse than ever. Now is the time for the Alberta government to show some leadership and to listen to what Albertans are telling us. Bill 204 shows we are serious about protecting Albertans from distracted driving. A simple monetary fine hasn't been strong enough to deter distracted driving. With Bill 204 repeat offenders risk losing their licence if they do not change their driving behaviour.

Driving requires your full attention, Madam Speaker. Let's make Alberta a safer place by ensuring we do our best to reduce distractions

in vehicles. I value and respect all my colleagues' comments regarding this bill. I would like to thank everyone who participated in this debate and urge all hon. members to vote in support of Bill 204.

I call the question.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

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

Mr. Amery: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move Bill 204 to Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

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

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was very encouraged by the discussion during second reading, and I'm honoured to continue the discussion on Bill 204 here today and begin Committee of the Whole. I would like to thank everyone who spoke on Bill 204 already and everyone who will speak today.

Making real, measurable change is the kind of thing we aspire to as MLAs, Madam Chair, making real change for the people we work for, the people of this great province of ours. I look forward to carrying on debate today as we work towards real change.

Bill 204 is short and effective, presenting two key amendments to the Traffic Safety Act. Even those of us who are not lawyers easily interpret what is being proposed. Imagine, Madam Chair, if all bills were written this way.

Section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act is amended by adding subsection (5). Subsection (5) includes two provisions:

- (5) A person who is guilty of an offence under 115.1, 115.2, 115.3 or 115.4
 - (a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and
 - (b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

4:00

Both of these provisions are absolutely necessary, Madam Chair, for this bill to be successful in curbing distracted driving. The \$250 fine is an increase from the former fine of \$172. This new fine would be one of the highest fines in Canada. This fine takes into consideration the severity of the infraction. Distracted driving is a very serious infraction that should not be taken lightly. We have discussed at length the implications and dangers that come with distracted driving, and I hope nobody will forget the conclusion that distracted driving kills.

Many of us have spoken about how many times we have seen distracted drivers on our commutes. A few of us have even admitted to being guilty ourselves. A \$250 fine will sting for those who choose cellphones and other electronic devices over safety, and it adds up very quickly for repeat offenders. Bill 204 amends section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act by adding subsection (5), and this will give authorities the power to administer this fine.

Madam Chair, the \$172 fine being amended here is one of the lower distracted driving fines amongst Canadian provinces. I proposed Bill 204 because the effectiveness of this fine has been poor. It hasn't reduced incidents of distracted driving and thus hasn't made our roads safer. We must consider that wages in Alberta are the highest, on average, in Canada. Financially many Albertans are able to brush off the fine with few significant consequences.

Madam Chair, we need a stronger deterrent. Our fine should represent the significance of the problem and the seriousness with which we treat it. By raising the fine to \$250, we will be in a position where offenders will take notice.

Bill 204 also proposes the introduction of three demerit points assessed to parties guilty of distracted driving. This point is just as integral to the vision of the bill as the increased monetary fine. Madam Chair, previously with past distracted driving legislation, notably Bill 16 from 2011, there weren't any demerits given to drivers guilty of distracted driving. That meant that as long as they had money to pay their fines, their driving records remained clean.

Distracted driving is like playing Russian roulette; if you keep playing, eventually you will lose. You may get away with driving distracted a few times, but you risk your life and the lives of others every time you do. Eventually the odds will catch up with you.

By adding three demerits, we are doing two very important things, Madam Chair. Firstly, we are working to prevent new drivers from becoming distracted drivers. Three demerit points are a significant consequence for drivers with clean records, especially young, graduated-licence drivers. Secondly, we are creating a very strong deterrent for repeat offenders.

Fifteen demerits over two years is all a driver is allowed before their licence is suspended and only eight demerits for drivers with a graduated licence, or GDL. Madam Chair, drivers will quickly realize that distracted driving can quickly result in having their driving privileges revoked. Three demerit points represent 20 per cent of allowable demerits. It represents 38 per cent for those with a GDL licence. That is a significant penalty, especially for those with prior infractions. When choosing between driving distracted or driving focused, I think many Albertans will choose to be focused when their driving privileges are on the line. You can text all you want from home if your licence has been suspended.

Madam Chair, this hard-line approach is absolutely needed to give our police officers a chance to fight distracted driving. Bill 204 will allow us to get serial distracted drivers off the road. Plus, it is important to keep the provision that would allow for the assessment of three demerit points in Bill 204.

Reading through Bill 204, it is important to remember that this is something we as elected officials have been asked for by Albertans. Albertans are the ones driving change here. We can be the conduits for that change. Adding subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act is a win for the citizens of this province. It is a win for all Albertans, who value safety on our roads.

Madam Chair, this isn't about taking away liberties or punishing people. This is about aligning Alberta's laws with the values of all Albertans. This is a way to remind drivers to pull over to a safe place when responding to a phone call or to wait until they arrive safely at their destinations and to use common sense when

attempting to eat while they are driving. It is a reminder that the rear-view mirror is for looking behind you and not for vanity.

I am not here to lay blame on any particular group of people. I am not here to take away your cellphones. I am simply asking this Assembly to help make the future safer than our past. I want us to look forward and work to tackle a problem that has been going on for too long.

Madam Chair, Bill 16 started this conversation back in 2011. Since that time distracted driving has not gone away. In fact, it has gotten worse. It is time to add a new voice to this conversation, the voice of today's Albertans, who are fed up with distracted drivers endangering lives on the road. Bill 204 adds to this voice by increasing the fine and adding three demerits to an offender's driving record.

I'm excited to see this bill discussed here in Committee of the Whole, but I will not be satisfied until this bill is working to deter Albertans from driving distracted. I would like to work with everyone here to make sure that happens, and I urge you to support Bill 204.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, and I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-East on this bill and for obtaining unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed through to committee stage today. We will be supporting this bill.

It is interesting. I look back just a very few years, to when there were a number of us pushing for some form of a ban. At that time it was seen primarily as a ban on cellphone use while driving, and it was referred to one of the standing committees. We heard from the public, and we invited the police forces from Edmonton, Calgary, and, I believe, also the sheriffs to come and make presentations. On the basis of their advice we broadened out the definition from just cellphone use to all forms of distracted driving and brought forward that legislation. There was quite a bit of reluctance on the part of the government at that time to bring forward this legislation, but I think MLAs from all sides began to see the merits of that legislation, and eventually the government was persuaded to allow a private member's bill to proceed. It had the deficiency, I think, in that it did not impose demerits for convictions, so that's an important distinction. As well, the fines have been increased.

The bill brings Alberta in line generally with what is being done in other jurisdictions. We're currently the only province that does not give out demerits for distracted driving. Ontario and Nova Scotia just recently changed their legislation to include demerits.

I think one thing that I just want to mention is that this is also a boon to insurance companies, of course, because it gives them additional opportunities to raise people's rates, and some may see that as an additional disincentive to distracted driving. Others might take a different view with regard to that. Certainly, the increase in fines is justified, and many members today have spoken very eloquently about the impact of distracted driving on safety on our roads.

It's interesting that in the United States a study in 2009 found that 84 per cent of distracted driving accidents were due to carelessness or inattentiveness. In 2010 a study found that 80 per cent of collisions and 65 per cent of near misses had distracted driving as a contributing factor. In 2011 Alberta Transportation found that distracted drivers were three times more likely to be involved in a

collision than nondistracted drivers. Madam Chair, it's estimated that in Canada the cost for these collisions is at least \$10 billion, and it's clearly a very serious issue that's costing a great deal and threatening the lives of Albertans.

I think that it's an issue that's of considerable importance, and without going on any longer with regard to this, I do just want to get on the record as being supportive of Bill 204 and indicate that our caucus will be supporting it. Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 204, brought forward by Calgary-East, will go to fix the deficiencies we had in the bill before. You know, we can bring in all the bills, as I said before, but we need the enforcement. This bill will bring our law more in line with Ontario, where they have introduced demerits, too.

In the bill the proposal is to add to section 158:

(5) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3 or 115.4

(a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and

(b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

After the last law came into effect, I think people were just becoming complacent. They didn't care. They said: "Okay. I'll just pay the \$172 fine. It's not a big deal." You could see that the law was not really working, and I think that maybe enforcement was an issue there, too. I see lots of people driving on the highway. They've got their phone, and they're texting, and they're doing whatever.

As I said before, too, people think that when they are in their car, it's their private property, that there should be no intrusion, that they can do whatever they want. Then in 2011 the government moved to limit the causes of distracted driving, namely the use of cellphones, by banning the use of these devices while operating a vehicle. As time passed, many, including police services, found that people continued to drive distracted without concern for a fine. Some, such as Chief Rick Hanson of the Calgary police at the time, called for demerit points to be issued to those convicted of distracted driving. Currently demerits are assessed and based on the demerit point and service of documents regulation, and this will only be demerits listed in the TSA itself.

Other provinces such as Ontario also have demerit points for distracted driving. As I said before, they have three demerits. The Ontario police have referred to distracted driving as the number one killer on the road. It is the number one killer on the road. You know, the previous Minister of Transportation was a big fan of education, and I think we should go for education, too.

Madam Chair, if you remember, we had those stickers saying: God, give us another boom. Do you remember that sticker? Maybe we should have some stickers for education. We have the report-a-poacher sticker, and I think maybe we should come out with a sticker where it says: report a distracted driver. You know, you see those stickers on cars. When people see a car driving by with the sticker on it, maybe they will think twice before they use their phone to send a text message or be on the phone.

You know, I'm glad. This is a step in the right direction, Madam Chair. As I've said before, too, maybe there should be a heavier fine than \$250 because, like the member before said, it's going to save us \$10 million in health care costs. It's going to save us all the way down on safety and productivity and all of that, right?

With those comments, Madam Chair, I'm glad to support this bill, and I congratulate the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. Maybe, you know, we should come out with those stickers so we can hand them out for education. Even on the seat

belts, once they're locked into effect, people will not be really compliant. Maybe it's going to take education and enforcement, so let's do those both.

With that, I wish the best of luck to the Member for Calgary-East, and I will be wholeheartedly supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Allen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. Before I get into it, I'd like to reiterate my thanks as well to the hon. member for being a stalwart advocate for safer driving. We're on the verge of making real progress here, and we should be grateful to him for taking the initiative and spearheading this.

Today I'd like to delve into some of the details of the bill. Specifically, I'd like to take a closer look at the amendment adding the fine to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act. Section 158 is part of the Traffic Safety Act that enumerates the punishments for traffic infringements. Madam Chair, after section 158(4) Bill 204 would add subsection (5), which in turn includes subsection (a). This is one of the chief components of this amendment. It stipulates that "a person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4 [would be] liable to a fine of \$250." It immediately precedes the addition of three demerit points for distracted driving infractions. In the Traffic Safety Act as it currently stands, the fine is set at \$172. This amendment would increase that fine substantially.

Madam Chair, this piece is obviously integral to the intent of the bill as a whole. The whole point of Bill 204 is to discourage distracted driving, and it seeks to do this by beefing up the penalties for offences. A lot of attention has been given to the question of demerit points, but this increased fine is an important part of the solution as well. The amount currently required by the act is \$172, which is extremely low when compared to the rest of the country. In fact, it is one of the lowest such fines in the country. Saskatchewan's legislation calls for a fine of \$280, for instance, whereas legislation in Ontario allows for fines ranging between \$300 and \$1,000. Legislation in some other provincial jurisdictions also has a graduation of fines, increasing with each offence. The amendment proposed by Bill 204 would set us on the path of catching up to tougher distracted driving legislation across the nation.

A fine of \$250 is not necessarily going to break the bank for all drivers, but it does send a message, and it certainly communicates that message far more effectively than the current fine of \$172 does. This is why the new section would prove so vital. The message that distracted driving is dangerous and unacceptable to Albertans apparently has not been getting through. More drivers are injured and killed in accidents caused by distracted driving than even in those caused by drunk driving, yet drunk driving carries a severe social stigma while distracted driving doesn't. People get drunk, and they get it that drunk driving is wrong. The same cannot be said for distracted driving. Far from being stigmatized, it is treated as commonplace.

Adding subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act should hopefully turn this around, or at the very least it will help to assert more forcefully that distracted driving is no laughing matter. Increasing the fine could set the precedent. It could demonstrate that tougher penalties could be in the cards if improvements are not seen. Despite being an increase from our current fines, the proposed fine of \$250 is not as severe as it is in other jurisdictions. There

would be room to take further action later on if the results are not satisfactory.

4:20

The importance of adding subsection (5)(a) cannot be appreciated fully in isolation. It would be followed immediately by subsection (b), which is the demerit points, when those enter the picture. It's arguably the demerit points that give Bill 204's amendments to the Traffic Safety Act their punitive teeth. Demerit points stick to a driver's record and carry with them the possibility that driving privileges could ultimately be impacted or even revoked. This is almost certainly a more effective long-term deterrent than a fine.

However, the fine proposed by Bill 204 plays a key role in complementing the demerit penalty. This amendment to the act will present offenders with an immediate and tangible consequence for their actions. In the grand scheme of things a fine, no matter how large, probably does not amount to very much when compared with something more lasting such as a poor driving abstract that results in the loss of privileges. But this is ultimately beside the point. The point is that it gets a driver's attention the instant he or she is fined for an offence. It serves as a valuable reality check.

One reason distracted driving may not be taken as seriously as something like drunk driving is that the immediate consequences are not always as obvious. Drivers are probably perfectly sober and aware while they are driving and, for example, texting, so it's not readily apparent that they are as great a risk as if they were intoxicated. But being slapped with a fine brings them back into reality pretty quickly, and that's what this addition to the Traffic Safety Act would achieve. It would add some much-needed kick to this reality check, with a heftier fine. After all, the point of fines for traffic violations is corrective, not vindictive. They serve primarily as a wake-up call.

Research data is conflicting as to how effective deterrents can be regarding traffic violations, but many people do report that receiving a fine does get the message across. It may not work for some people, but it seems to me that the majority have no malicious intent when they do something like driving while distracted; it is simply that they're not thinking fully in the moment. I think often back to the years when we had to put in legislation to make seat belts mandatory. Over the generations that has just become an automatic thing for drivers. All they need is the nudge to remind them of their future conduct.

This amendment accomplishes two things. While the demerits, the real meat of the proposed new penalty, serve as a heftier deterrent, the fine of \$250 complements it as a more minor chastisement. Madam Chair, as we have heard reiterated in this Chamber time and time again, distracted driving is a serious and prevalent problem. What I'm also hearing is that we're committed to addressing it. The addition of subsection (5) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act represents a great step in the right direction. Subsection (a) in particular will set us on the path of ensuring that more robust monetary penalties are in place to act as a more effective deterrent.

With that, I conclude my comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Asia Pacific Relations.

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the traffic safety amendment act, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-East. I commend the hon. member for being an advocate for safety on our roads, and I'm proud to speak to the proposed bill. I will specifically be talking today about how implementing Bill 204 would add subsection

(5)(b) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act, which would add three demerit points for each distracted driving offence.

Madam Chair, in any given year the number of people killed on Alberta roads is roughly equivalent to the population of the average Alberta elementary school. Ninety per cent of collisions are driving error related. Distracted driving is a major issue, with performance degradation similar to impaired driving. We know that drinking and driving is wrong, yet texting and driving is still very common. Both inhibit your ability to drive safely. That's why the amendment to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act would be beneficial. It could hopefully reduce those numbers.

Bill 204 would help with the enforcement of the Alberta distracted driving law by creating harsher punishments for those accused. Madam Chair, with demerit points being allocated and fines increased for an offence, this would allow for greater deterrents to distracted drivers. The purpose of Bill 204 is to increase penalties for distracted driving by amending the Traffic Safety Act to include a monetary penalty of \$250 and three demerit points for each distracted driving offence.

The section this bill is attempting to amend is 158 of the act, which reads:

(1) Except as otherwise provided in this Act, a person who is guilty of an offence under this Act for which a penalty is not otherwise provided is liable to a fine or other punishment as provided for under the Provincial Offences Procedure Act.

(2) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 52(1)(c), 65(1)(h) or (2) or 115(2)(g) or (h) is liable to a fine of not less than \$500 and not more than \$25 000 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months without the option of a fine.

(3) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 51(i) is liable to a fine of not less than \$300 and not more than \$2000 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term of not less than 14 days and not more than 6 months.

(4) A person who is guilty of an offence under section 176 is liable to a fine of not less than \$200 and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 months.

Now, in addition to those, Bill 204 seeks to add a fifth subsection, which would read:

A person who is guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4

(a) is liable to a fine of \$250, and

(b) shall be assessed 3 demerit points in accordance with the regulations.

Madam Chair, one objective of the proposed bill is to address distracted driving by introducing demerit points for each offence in addition to an increased fine of \$250. Presently the punishment for distracted driving is only a \$172 fine with no demerit points, so the addition of demerit points in subsection (5)(b) of section 158 is important because while the immediate penalty of paying \$250 as described in subsection (5)(a) stings, the long-term penalty of having the demerit points on one's record can hurt more. If someone receives too many demerit points, an individual can lose their licence, and the insurance premium may increase. If an individual's insurance premium goes up because of demerit points, then it acts as a further punitive measure in addition to the initial \$250 fine.

Madam Chair, the individual could be paying for a distracted driving offence in more ways than one. The Alberta driver control board may even suspend a licence if they consider the driver to have a poor driving record based on the number of demerit points they have accumulated. Without subsection (5)(b) the board would not know that someone has been found guilty of distracted driving because they would not have any demerit points.

Fully licensed drivers who collect a total of eight but not more than 15 demerit points will receive notification regarding their driving record. If 15 demerit points accumulate within a two-year period, then an offender will lose their licence, and it will be suspended for 30 days. If a suspension order is issued, there may be conditions that must be completed before the licence will be given back. There's also a fee that must be paid before the licence is returned. So with accumulated demerit points one could face the loss of the driver's licence privileges, increased vehicle insurance premiums, and loss of employment if driving is a required part of the job. Those deterrents do not exist under the current system, which is why I do strongly support Bill 204 and the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act within it.

4:30

Many people need to have a clean driving record, or at least nearly clean, to successfully be hired for a job. Whether that person is driving a company vehicle or being reimbursed, that driving record is very important to employers. Employers want to ensure that they are hiring a safe and responsible person to work for their organization. If passed, subsection 5(b) would allow employers the opportunity to know if they are hiring someone who will be a hazard on the road based on how many demerit points they have.

Alberta currently has the most lax laws regarding distracted driving. With no demerit points, it's no wonder Alberta beats the next-worst offending province on distracted driving by 37 per cent. Madam Chair, we all want Alberta to be the safest province in the country, but we cannot achieve that while our distracted driving is out of control. Most Albertans know it is wrong to text or call while driving, and we applaud those people for being safe on our roads. However, those who are distracted drivers have not yet felt the pinch of their wrongdoing.

Implementing Bill 204 would make amendment 5(b) to section 158 of the Traffic Safety Act, which would add three demerit points for each distracted driving offence. This act came into effect in 2011, and the original intent was to reduce and prevent incidents of distracted driving, but it just does not do an adequate job of deterring people from breaking their distracted driving habits. We know this because our province has the worst offender rates in the country by far. The current law has not noticeably reduced incidents of distracted driving. The addition of demerit points under subsection 5(b) is an important piece of this legislation. With current legislation someone could be paying the \$172 fine every month but have a clean driving record because there are no demerit points at present.

Albertans are looking to their MLAs to develop new and comprehensive solutions, and they are ready to do their part to help. Bill 204 has substantial value in that it addresses an issue of public safety and awareness that has been a topic of discussion for a long time. That is why Bill 204 is an urgent and necessary piece of legislation. It combats the dangerous result of this recent problem.

Madam Chair, as you can see, Bill 204 is a very sensible and well-timed piece of legislation. This bill has support across the board from all parties, and it's a rare and wonderful thing that we can all collaborate on this issue. I would like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for working together on Bill 204. Again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for bringing this discussion forward and for voicing the needs of his constituents as well as the needs of our province. Distracted driving is a very real problem with very real consequences that affect Albertans, and Albertans are ready for change to the current legislation.

It has been a privilege to speak to this bill and listen to the debate surrounding this very important issue. I look forward to hearing the rest of my hon. colleagues discussing this topic.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Fenske: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think most everything has been said, and I just would like to encourage all my fellow members to support this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014, sponsored by my next-door neighbour the hon. Member for Calgary-East, an annoying neighbour sometimes. I'd like to thank him for bringing Bill 204 forward for discussion. His efforts are certain to make Alberta's roads safer for everyone.

If passed, Bill 204 would amend the Traffic Safety Act by increasing the severity of penalties for distracted driving. As we know, the penalty for distracted driving is a fine of \$172, offenders are not penalized with demerit points, and the cost of the fine does not increase with the number of offences. Bill 204 would change this by introducing demerit points as a penalty for distracted driving in addition to a fine of \$250. It would stipulate that a person who's guilty of an offence under section 115.1, 115.2, 115.3, or 115.4, would be liable for a fine of \$250 plus three demerit points.

Madam Chair, section 115.2 is an important part of this legislation. It specifies that no individual should drive or operate a vehicle on a highway if the display screen of a television, computer, or other device is in the vehicle. While it may seem obvious that a TV or computer screen would constitute distracted driving, there are cases that require drivers to look at a screen. Exemptions are related to using TV or computer screens for driving. Any other use than the ones listed below are distracting to drivers and would therefore be deserving of a fine and demerits.

The amendments to section 158 would allow for there to be a further distinction of exemptions under section 115.2(2)(a) to (f). That explains that drivers may look at the screen of a GPS while allowing them to navigate. However, in accordance with section 115.3(2)(a) and (b) the GPS must be affixed to the vehicle in a manner that does not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle and must not be held in the driver's hand. That notation is important because GPS systems serve a valuable purpose in allowing drivers to navigate. They clearly need to be set up for use before the person starts driving, or else they become a hazard. It's particularly important to note that driving and entering co-ordinates is a major distraction that could very well result in an accident. With most of the factory-installed ones I don't think you can enter on them while you're moving but certainly the hand-held.

Section 115.2(2)(b) refers to the exemption of a cellular telephone or radio communication device being used in hands-free mode, which can also be distracting, just not as distracting. This section takes into account the fact that people need to conduct calls in their vehicles. Madam Chair, we know that it's necessary to take calls in our cars with the amount of driving that we do. The section allows all drivers to take their calls in a safe manner. Many cellphone and car companies offer different ways for drivers to use their phones in hands-free mode while driving. In doing so, they

allow drivers to take important calls while ensuring that they are still driving safely.

Section 115.2(2)(c) makes an exemption for logistical transportation tracking systems that are used to track vehicle locations, driver status, and the delivery of packages or other goods for commercial purposes. By taking business into account, we're allowing for the flow of commerce in a necessary way.

Section 115.2(2)(d) allows drivers to use a dispatch system while transporting passengers, allowing taxi, limo, and other transport vehicles to use dispatch systems. It lets them do their job, and it allows them to find clients. By allowing transport vehicles to use their equipment safely, we increase the mobility of Albertans and, in doing so, reduce the stress on parking lots around the province.

Section 115.2(2)(e) exempts the use of any collision avoidance system device while it's being used to provide collision avoidance information. There are clear benefits to this exemption in that the device being used is meant to avoid collisions and would therefore be an extension of driving rather than a distraction.

Section 115.2(2)(f) allows for instruments, gauges, devices, or systems that provide information about the status of systems or the location of the vehicle. An exemption of this nature is critical because it allows drivers to handle their vehicles properly. Being able to read something like a speedometer while driving is a function of driving and allows the driver to obey the rules of the road.

References in Bill 204 to sections 158(5) and 115.2 give a clear purpose for each of these exemptions. Simply put, these exemptions allow for drivers to look at screens when they're used for driving. The reason this section disallows watching TV or a computer screen is because it is not necessary or safe to be watching media that is not related to operating the vehicle. Very simply, if a person is not focused on driving, that person is distracted and therefore impaired.

So rather than sort of carrying on with that, I think I've made the point that most others have, that this is a good piece of legislation. I would encourage all hon. members to support it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 204?

Seeing none, I would ask the Member for Calgary-East to close.

4:40

Mr. Amery: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm so privileged to rise to close Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 204. I would like to thank all the hon. members who rose to speak in this debate. You are of great service to your constituencies and a great asset to democracy.

Many of us have spoken passionately about this subject and for very good reason. Madam Chair, Bill 204 addresses a subject that affects all of us. We all use Alberta's roads in one way or another, and we are all put at risk by the actions of distracted drivers. Now, I'm asking that we all do our part to vanquish this problem. I want our grandchildren to look back with shock that we ever texted while we drove, that we ever used our mirrors to apply makeup, or otherwise took our eyes off the road. I want our children to look back on today like we look back on cars without seat belts. Driving distracted should be a relic of a bygone time.

With Bill 204 we can begin to make that happen. I call on all my colleagues to support this bill. Let's ensure safer roads for all future generations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are you ready for the question on Bill 204?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 204 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I would now move that we rise and report.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports Bill 204. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly as there are none.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move Bill 204 to third reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A lot of things have been said, so I would like to move third reading of Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Distracted Driving Demerit) Amendment Act, 2014.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak on Bill 204 in third reading?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:45 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

For the motion:

Allen	Johnson, L.	Olesen
Amery	Kang	Quadri
Bhullar	Kennedy-Glans	Quest
Brown	Khan	Rodney

Cao	Klimchuk	Rowe
Dirks	Lemke	Sandhu
Donovan	Leskiw	Sarich
Dorward	Luan	Starke
Fenske	Lukaszuk	Strankman
Fraser	Mandel	Towle
Fritz	Mason	Wilson
Jansen	McIver	Woo-Paw
Johnson, J.	Oberle	Xiao

Totals:	For – 39	Against – 0
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[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 204 read a third time]

Mr. Oberle: Madam Speaker, at this time I would move that we call it 5 o'clock and move to Motions Other than Government Motions.

[Motion carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Lyme Disease

508. Mr. Rowe moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a province-wide strategy to combat the debilitating effects of Lyme disease, which, at minimum, would include additional education for physicians and access to additional testing and treatment for patients.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce Motion 508. I'm sure that everyone in the Assembly has heard of Lyme disease. Lyme disease is not a usual topic of conversation unless you are a family member of or are one of the unfortunate people to have contracted it. Then it is a topic of conversation each and every day if not every waking hour.

5:00

Motion 508 calls for the broadening of the treatment resources and options available to those who may potentially be suffering from Lyme disease. I first became aware of how serious this issue has become when two women in my home town of Beiseker contracted Lyme. Unable to get local doctors or AHS to treat them, they went south of the border to the U.S.A., where they were tested. The tests showed positive. Upon bringing their tests home, they found, to their dismay, that the test results were not recognized in Canada, and they were denied treatment. Two separate fundraisers were held, and approximately \$135,000 was raised to assist with costs to get treatment in American medical facilities.

The tests done in Canada, Madam Speaker, are done in two stages. First, an ELISA test is done. If this shows a negative result, no further testing is done. According to the centre for disease control the ELISA test alone only detects about 30 per cent of cases at first presentation. In Canada if it shows a positive result, a second test is done, the western blot. The western blot test does have a much higher accuracy but is not done if the ELISA test is negative. By this time the disease has advanced to a point where it is much harder to treat. Additionally, there are in fact two western blot tests, IgC and IgM. Both tests should be done and are done in the United States but are not often administered in Canada.

One of the most frustrating things about the treatment policy in Alberta is that Lyme disease is treatable with antibiotics if caught within two to three weeks of the tick bite. Unfortunately, this is hard

to do, because even with the telltale bull's-eye rash around the bite it seems to be very difficult to find a doctor with the necessary education to identify the disease and begin the required treatment immediately. Madam Speaker, this problem will only get worse if we do not address it very soon.

We all know that climate change exists. I will leave the specifics of that debate for others at another forum. Very much like the pine beetle problem that we are experiencing in western Canada, we can expect the tick-borne disease problem to increase. With warmer winters we are not seeing insects killed off by prolonged cold spells.

Recently Bill C-442, the Canadian Lyme disease strategy act, submitted by Green Party MP Elizabeth May, was passed unanimously in the House of Commons. Not a single MP voted against it, the first and so far only Green Party legislation to pass in the House of Commons. In Ontario NDP MPP Michael Mantha's Motion 13, to create a comprehensive and integrated Lyme disease strategy, also passed unanimously on November 27, 2014, again with all-party support.

So, Madam Speaker, I would ask the same of all members of this Assembly. I ask them to pass Motion 508, and let's get on with helping patients, their families, and their loved ones in getting through this difficult and very painful time. This motion will ensure Albertans have the ability to extensively be tested for Lyme disease. This motion takes into account treatment standards that previously exist and will move forward to make more testing procedures and treatments, which are necessary and, indeed, vital to treatment, available. I invite all members to join me in discussing this important piece of legislation so that we may ensure the safety and the good health of all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 508. It's a topic of considerable professional interest of mine, so I'm very appreciative.

Mr. Dorward: Oh, no.

Dr. Starke: What? You're groaning already?

It's a topic of interest to me, and I'd like to certainly thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for raising it. As we know, he's had an outstanding career in municipal government, and he followed that up with time in the Official Opposition, where he was a principled and dedicated although somewhat tenacious member of the opposition, and now we're very glad to have him in the government caucus.

Lyme disease, l-y-m-e, not lime disease due to the citrus fruit. Lyme disease is a very interesting disease because there's a lot that is misunderstood about Lyme disease even today. It gets its name from the community of Lyme, Connecticut, in the New England states, where the prevalence in the U.S. is certainly the highest. It was first recognized by a high incidence of patients that had arthritis in and around Lyme and Old Lyme, Connecticut, in 1975, but in fact the disease was first described in scientific literature in 1908 in Sweden.

The causative organism for Lyme disease: although it's associated with ticks, it's not the ticks that cause the Lyme disease; it's an organism that the ticks carry. That organism is a spirochetal bacterium of the *Borrelia* genus. So the technical term for Lyme disease is also known as Lyme borreliosis, or borreliosis.

In the late 1970s the American bacteriologist Willy Burgdorfer actually characterized and discovered that the *Borrelia* that he was

studying was in fact the causative organism for Lyme disease, and the organism was officially named *Borrelia burgdorferi* in his honour. If you're a bacteriologist, that is the highest pinnacle that you be acclaimed for, that they name a disease-causing organism after you.

Last year, Madam Speaker, I was very privileged to attend the 69th International Conference on Diseases in Nature Communicable to Man in Vancouver, the INCNDCM conference, that the people who attended somewhat tongue-in-cheek called the inkdinkum conference. Now, Dr. Robert Lane, who is a renowned entomologist from the University of California at Berkeley, gave a very interesting presentation on some very important facts on the transmission of Lyme disease by the deer tick of the genus *Ixodes*.

Now, ticks must stay attached for a certain period of time, but there's considerable disagreement as to how long. It's generally accepted that the tick must stay attached for at least 36 hours for Lyme transmission to occur, but some have suggested that it could be transmitted in as little as six hours. Certainly, adult ticks are larger and more noticeable, and quite often they're found within that time window and removed, and if they are, then transmission does not occur. I know that in my practice quite often that's all I would tell my clients. If they were worried about Lyme disease, I'd say: "After you've had your dog out for a walk, check him over for ticks. If you find any adult ticks on them, pick them off, and you shouldn't have any problem with Lyme disease."

In the truth of the matter, though – and this was something that I learned at this conference last year – by far the greater risk of transmission of the Lyme disease spirochete is not the adult deer tick but, in fact, the nymph form, or the nymph life stage, of the deer tick, which is about the size of a poppy seed, so it's very difficult to detect, certainly, on humans, and you can imagine on a long-haired, dark-coated dog how hard it might be to find that. Nymphal ticks, in fact, are many, many times more likely to transmit Lyme disease, and those findings were corroborated by Dr. Lane in the study and in the presentation that he made to our conference last year. That is one of the things that is misunderstood about Lyme disease and why anything we could do to increase the amount of public knowledge and education there is about, you know, this condition is helpful.

Now, the other reason why I wanted to speak today about Lyme disease – and it really speaks to the heart of the challenges that the member who's bringing this forward has highlighted – is that Lyme disease is what in medical circles is called a zebra. What exactly is a zebra? Well, Madam Speaker, a zebra is an American term, actually, that states, basically, that arriving at an exotic medical diagnosis when a more commonplace explanation is more likely is a common fault, especially of inexperienced diagnosticians. What the full phrase is: when you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras.

I first heard this expression, I have to confess, when I was a veterinary student, and it was told to us by Dr. Otto Radostits. Dr. Radostits was the pre-eminent veterinary clinical instructor in large animal medicine world-wide, and we were very fortunate to have him at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, in Saskatoon. He's originally, though, an Edmontonian, very proud that he came from Alberta, and he was awarded with the Order of Canada late in his teaching career. His son Stephen still operates a veterinary practice in Leduc, Alberta. In honour of Dr. Radostits we always thought that the zebras thing was a Dr. Radostits thing, but in fact it was first coined in the early 40s by Dr. Theodore Woodward, who was a medical professor at the University of Maryland. He told one of his medical interns: when you hear hoofbeats, think of horses, not zebras.

5:10

The reason for that is because there is a natural human tendency to glom onto the diagnosis that is unusual, the diagnosis that is, you know, wild and out there, at least amongst inexperienced diagnosticians. But over a period of time and through training, with aphorisms like the one from Dr. Woodward, the tendency is to move away from rare diagnoses and, in fact, to spend less time worrying about rare diagnoses because, by definition, they occur rarely. This is a problem with diseases that have low levels of prevalence, in that more often than not, as is the case with Lyme disease in Alberta, where we are very fortunate that we have a very low prevalence, the truth of the matter is that the disease still occurs, and as was pointed out by the hon. member in his introductory remarks, the testing is not one hundred per cent accurate.

In fact, the presentation of the clinical science is not always consistent. The bull's-eye rash that was described, erythema migrans, in fact, only occurs in about three-quarters of patients. So if you are bitten by a tick but don't develop erythema migrans, you might never know that, in fact, you have contracted Lyme disease.

I mean, the bottom line is that whenever we're dealing with rare diseases, calculations involving probability really have no meaning. Really, the pertinent question is whether disease is present in that individual or not, and whether it is rare or common really does not change the odds for that single patient. If the diagnosis can be made on the basis of specific criteria, then these criteria are either fulfilled in that patient or not fulfilled. It's not like you can have 70 per cent of Lyme disease. You either have it or you don't have it. That's one of the challenges whenever you're dealing with conditions that occur infrequently, and it is something that has been correctly pointed out through this motion. You know, certainly, I think anything that we can do to assist our medical practitioners, our public health workers, and people in general about Lyme disease are important steps to be taken.

As I said before, in Alberta we are fortunate in that the incidence of this disease is very low, but with changes in climate and with other changes that we have seen over a period of time, the incidence is increasing, and of course, as we know, we do travel to other parts of the world where Lyme disease is at relatively higher levels.

The other reason why I'd like to commend the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on this motion is that Lyme disease is a disease that for many, many years has been badly misunderstood and characterized incorrectly even by those in the scientific community. At last year's conference we spent a full day discussing Lyme disease, and there were speakers from all around the world talking about their perspectives on Lyme disease for their individual areas of the planet, and I can tell you that even there there was some disagreement as far as the pathogenesis, transmission, and some of the other key features of Lyme disease. So I really think that it is a disease that, because of its severe, chronic, debilitating effects, we have to always have higher on our index of suspicion, and that holds true for all health care practitioners, doctors, public health officials, and others.

I think, Madam Speaker, the description of Lyme disease that was given by Jonathan Edlow, who was a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, when he quoted Ed Masters in his book *Bull's-Eye*, on the history of Lyme disease, tells that best. He points out the following:

the "track record" or the "conventional wisdom" regarding Lyme disease is not very good: "First off, they said it was a new disease, which it wasn't. Then it was thought to be viral, but it isn't. Then it was thought that sero-negativity didn't exist, which it does. They thought it was easily treated by short courses of antibiotics, which sometimes it isn't. Then it was only the *Ixodes dammini* tick, which we now know is not even a separate valid tick species.

If you look throughout the history, almost every time a major dogmatic statement has been made about what we 'know' about this disease, it was subsequently proven wrong or underwent major modifications."

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's very difficult to follow the accurate presentations from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, because both have certain accuracies. I can personally relate to them because my wife has been diagnosed with Lyme disease, so it relates significantly to our household, and we've struggled through the Canadian medical system and the American medical system to try and get some rectification of a difficult disease. The spirit of the member's motion in the Legislative Assembly, bringing forward that we would have a province-wide strategy to combat this disease and to simply learn more about it, is heartfelt to this Member for Drumheller-Stettler. It's a significant disease, and it certainly is debilitating, and it is, as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster says, complicated and not easily diagnosed.

I have a prepared statement that I will read going forward here. Lyme disease is a bacterial illness spread to humans by ticks which have been found across Canada and within Alberta, as previously stated. Lyme disease seems to be an emerging, potentially serious public health risk as it is on the rise in Alberta, but awareness of the disease is lacking. In some cases, Madam Speaker, if you don't look for it, you aren't going to find it, and that's some of the seriousness of this disease. The testing methods are nebulous – I guess that would be a good word – to say the very least. Many Albertans afflicted with Lyme disease are undiagnosed and untreated and may go on to develop persistent, chronic, debilitating symptoms. Many maintain that the ticks that cause the disease are not found in Alberta and that only those who travel to infected areas have the disease.

As of 2013 the province began the submit-a-tick program to try and discover and learn the areas that this Lyme disease is located in and to determine how many were carrying the organism that causes the disease. In 2013 Albertans sent in 1,221 blacklegged ticks, and of those, only 50 were found on animals, and even fewer, five, were found on humans. Of the 50 ticks found on the animals, five tested positive for this along with one of the five found on humans. So the numbers are very diminishing. In 2013 a surveillance study by Alberta Health found that 20 per cent of the collected blacklegged ticks were found infected with Lyme disease. Only 20 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Lyme disease can have as many as 75 different symptoms and can be easily misdiagnosed as something else. Lyme disease patients may firstly be diagnosed with other illnesses such as juvenile arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, reactive arthritis, infectious arthritis, osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, fifth disease, multiple sclerosis, scleroderma, lupus, early ALS, Alzheimer's disease, Crohn's disease, and the list goes on. Canadians and Albertans, including my wife, often travel to IGenX Inc. in California or Stony Brook University in New York for diagnosis. Again, Madam Speaker, in Canada, if you're not looking for the disease, you're not going to find it.

Diagnosis is problematic, again for several reasons. Fewer than 50 per cent of patients with Lyme disease even recall a tick bite. In some studies this number is as low as 15 per cent, and fewer than 50 per cent of patients with Lyme disease recall any rash at all, and

the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had discussed that. Symptoms are nonspecific. It could be anything causing these symptoms. The screening test misses 35 per cent of culture-proven Lyme disease, with only 65 per cent sensitivity, and is unacceptable as the first step of a two-step screening protocol. By definition a screening test should have at least 95 per cent sensitivity. False negatives plague people who have the disease, again leading to a poor testing system.

There are two polarized views of Lyme disease, both in terms of diagnostic criteria and treatment. The Infectious Diseases Society of America, IDSA, Lyme disease guidelines suggest that Lyme disease is hard to catch, easy to cure, and that short-term antibiotic use of a few weeks can cure most Lyme disease. In Alberta the protocol for extended use of antibiotics is not conducive to solving the problem, and my wife ran into that problem. The International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society maintains that cases of chronic Lyme disease require an extended course of antibiotic therapy to achieve symptomatic relief and that the consequences of untreated chronic persistent Lyme infection far outweigh the potential consequences of long-term antibiotic therapy. Again, an idiosyncrasy of the health care system in this province if not in Canada.

5:20

There are also two polarized camps in response to the symptoms of the disease: those who truly have the disease and for whom treatment could be beneficial or would be beneficial and those who have nonspecific, sometimes debilitating symptoms which are also called fibromyalgia, chronic pain syndrome, and depression and who believe that Lyme disease may be the cause. For these people the treatment of Lyme disease would not be advised.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to close by saying that for the family of this Member for Drumheller-Stettler it's been a life-changing experience, it's been a life-changing challenge, and I'm pleased that in a past life the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I sat together in this House and had a long conversation about this disease. It gives me great honour to rise and try to inflict some education on the disease on the Assembly.

Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased to rise today to contribute to the debate on Motion 508, and I would like to begin my remarks by thanking the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. He's been an impassioned advocate for the cause, and I think all Albertans owe him a debt of gratitude for it.

This motion, as we know, seeks to encourage the government to develop a province-wide strategy that would address Lyme disease. Specifically, such a strategy would target physician education and awareness while also exploring issues like access to testing and treatment for patients afflicted with the disease.

Madam Speaker, I know a number of people personally who have contracted this disease, and I've seen the devastating effects firsthand. That is the reason I feel compelled to speak to this motion here today. As a bacterial illness Lyme disease is spread by tick bites, but it's not common, of course, since it depends on tick bites for transmission. That would seem to leave it confined mostly to those who frequent areas where ticks are common such as forests. Currently cases of Lyme disease are taken very seriously, as they should be, and every single one of them is reviewed very carefully.

Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, approximately 2,500 Albertans receive testing for the illness every single year. Meanwhile the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends a

protocol for laboratory testing for the disease, and this is the protocol, of course, that we follow right here in Alberta. Our diagnostic tests are indeed in line with the approval of federal regulations as laid out by Health Canada, and these standards, in turn, follow the protocols set by the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These protocols do set the standard of practice all over the globe for the testing and diagnosis of Lyme disease.

Madam Speaker, Alberta is very stringent in ensuring that we do follow best practices in diagnosing Lyme disease. Our protocol is structured around a two-stage method. First, an ELISA screening test is conducted, and that, of course, stands for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, which refers to the test that identifies the antibodies associated with Lyme disease. The second aspect of the protocol calls for the western blot test, the purpose of which is, of course, to confirm the results of the initial ELISA test. Alberta's Provincial Laboratory conducts the test, and if that's positive or – and this is important – if the results are indeterminate, the sample is then passed on to receive the western blot test at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Motion 508 is a tool that can help expand and also promote this standardized process for handling the testing and diagnosis of Lyme disease. We must all acknowledge that the diagnosis of this disease is not quite as straightforward as it may appear on first glance. There are several factors at play that can very much complicate things, including an individual's travel history and the season of travel. Those need to be taken into account regarding whether a condition is indeed Lyme disease. This is all in addition to the probability of tick exposure and the manifestation of symptoms. Now, these factors are considered by physicians when they make their diagnosis, and all play a role when the physician makes a decision regarding whether or not to send a patient for Lyme disease testing.

Madam Speaker, statistics yielded by our established processes do indicate some good news. In the entirety of last year, 2014, there were only seven confirmed cases of Lyme disease here in Alberta. In addition to that, every one of those cases was determined to have originated when the affected individuals were travelling outside of the province in areas which are known to contain disease-carrying ticks. Now, it's true that these are low numbers, but – and this is very important – it does not account for cases that go undiagnosed since it often takes months or even years for symptoms to become severe enough for someone to seek attention. That can be disastrous for a person professionally and personally as well as for their friends, family, and loved ones. Thankfully, we have solid, proven, effective protocols in place to manage cases as they do manifest themselves. However, without proper education and awareness on the part of medical professionals and all Albertans, cases can be undiagnosed, and that can be a very, very serious problem.

That's one of the major reasons why I truly appreciate the hon. member for bringing the topic of Lyme disease to the attention of all Albertans through this Chamber. Increasing the awareness of Lyme disease across Alberta is an initiative that is invaluable even if it just saved one person from this potentially debilitating illness. But I know it will do so much more than just that, and that's, again, another one of the reasons why I will definitely be voting in favour of Motion 508. I ask all of our hon. colleagues to join us in the fight against Lyme disease.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a great pleasure to speak to Motion 508, put forward by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. It goes on to say:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a province-wide strategy to combat the debilitating effects of Lyme disease, which, at minimum, would include additional education for physicians and access to additional testing and treatment for patients.

Lyme disease, Madam Speaker, is an infectious disease caused by bacteria of the *Borrelia* type. The most common sign of infection is an expanding area of redness that begins at the site of the bite about a week after it has occurred. The rash is typically neither itchy nor painful. About 25 per cent of people do not develop a rash. Other early symptoms may include fever, headache, and feeling tired. If untreated, symptoms may include the loss of the ability to move one or both sides of the face, joint pain, severe headaches with neck stiffness, or heart palpitations, among others. Months to years later there may be repeated episodes of joint pain and swelling. Occasionally people develop shooting pains or tingling in their arms and legs. About 10 to 20 per cent of people, despite appropriate treatment, also develop joint pains, have problems with memory, and feel tired much of the time.

Lyme disease is transmitted to humans by the bite of infected ticks. Usually the tick must be attached for 36 to 48 hours before the bacteria is spread. Diagnosis is based upon a combination of symptoms, history of tick exposure, and the possibility of testing for specific antibodies in the blood. Blood tests are often negative in the early disease, and testing of unusual ticks is not typically useful, Madam Speaker. Several forms of laboratory testing for Lyme disease are available, some of which have not been adequately validated. The most widely used tests are serological tests, which measure levels of specific antibodies in the patient's blood. These tests may be negative in early infections as the body may not have produced a significant quantity of antibodies, but they are considered a reliable aid in the diagnosis of later stages of Lyme disease. Serological tests for Lyme disease are of limited use in people lacking objective signs of Lyme disease, because of false-positive results and costs. The serological laboratory tests most widely available and employed are the western blot and ELISA. A two-tiered protocol is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The sensitive ELISA test is performed first, and if it is positive or equivocal, then the more specific western blot is done.

5:30

The reliability of testing and diagnosis remains controversial, Madam Speaker. Studies show that the western blot IgM has a specificity of 94 to 96 per cent for patients with clinical symptoms of early Lyme disease. The initial ELISA test has a positive sensitivity of about 70 per cent in two-tiered testing. The overall sensitivity is only 64 per cent although this rises to 100 per cent in a subset of people with disseminated symptoms such as arthritis.

Concerns have been raised by Albertans who believe they are infected by Lyme disease, Madam Speaker, yet who are unable to get the diagnosis. Typically the physician does not request a second test. Presently Alberta requires a blood test to come back from the laboratory with five positive indicators to define Lyme disease. The European standard requires only three indicators, so many feel that Alberta's diagnostic criteria for Lyme disease are unrealistically stringent, resulting in local labs giving out too many false negatives. Without a positive diagnosis from an Alberta lab any physician willing to treat Lyme disease risks censure by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta.

In Alberta ticks are collected and submitted for Lyme disease testing. Of the ticks submitted, only about 25 per cent are black-legged ticks, the type that carries Lyme, and even fewer of those test positive for Lyme. Without the proper tests being run for Lyme, patients are left without a treatment plan for their condition. Due to the general rarity of the need for these tests, providing the additional test, the second western blot test, would not be expensive, Madam Speaker.

In 2008 Dr. Taft, then the leader of the Alberta Liberal caucus, called on the government of Alberta to review and revise the Lyme disease testing. I will be supporting this motion, too, and I think all the members should support this motion. I think this will go a long way to help Albertans get tested for Lyme disease, and, you know, maybe we could control it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mrs. Towle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to join the debate on Motion 508, brought forward by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I would like to thank the hon. member for his dedication and his passion with regard to this motion itself and also to all Albertans. I'd also like to take a moment to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for reminding us of the very personal impact of Lyme disease.

Madam Speaker, Motion 508 urges the government to develop a comprehensive strategy in order to improve the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease. The main focus of this motion is to increase awareness regarding this disease as well as to increase patients' access to treatment. If left untreated, the effects of Lyme disease can persist for years, resulting in symptoms of fatigue and pain that can reach a level of physical disability equivalent to congestive heart failure or osteoarthritis. What is clear is that anything that might help prevent Albertans from being infected with or having to suffer through Lyme disease is something that we should all honestly consider.

I would like to focus my remarks today on what actions and programs other provinces have taken in order to address this potentially devastating disease. Prevention is a key part in any province. Lyme disease strategy in B.C. is no different. The B.C. Centre for Disease Control outlines the salient issues regarding prevention on its website. This includes information on how to identify potentially harmful species, what actions to take in order to avoid being bitten as well as proper tick removal. It is important to follow the appropriate procedure when removing a tick as not doing so can increase the risk of infection.

Like Alberta, British Columbia uses a two-tier system when it comes to Lyme disease detection and diagnosis. This focuses primarily on the use of an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay test, also known as an ELISA test, in order to identify specific antibodies. If the ELISA test is positive or indeterminate, the western blot test is used to confirm the results. Western blot is currently the most accurate antibody test, and ELISA testing can often miss the infection.

Lyme disease can be extremely difficult to diagnose, and this only increases the longer the disease remains untreated. Madam Speaker, the development of symptoms, often even months or years after the time of infection, is typically the only way to catch the disease, as routine blood work and testing cannot detect it. Supplementing their provincial program, British Columbia has the BC women's hospital's complex chronic disease program. This provincial referral centre provides comprehensive care to adults

with complex chronic diseases such as Lyme disease. The program performs clinical care as well as research.

The Saskatchewan Disease Control Laboratory follows the Lyme disease guidelines set forth by the Canadian Public Health Laboratory Network. They, too, use an initial ELISA test followed by a western blot in order to confirm results. In cases that prove especially difficult, patients may be referred to an infectious disease specialist. Madam Speaker, the government of Saskatchewan similarly outlines precautions to be taken to protect yourself against ticks, symptoms of infection as well as procedures to take if you suspect you have Lyme disease. Tests as well as research on the disease are performed at the University of Saskatchewan.

The government of Ontario also addresses the disease in much the same way. Its website is also a repository for information on the prevention, detection, and treatment of Lyme disease, including links to further valuable information about the condition. What is very much apparent when regarding the approach that other jurisdictions across the country take concerning Lyme disease is that there is a fairly standardized set of procedures already in place. Madam Speaker, the information is certainly out there, and there's no debate surrounding what current best practices are in the detection, prevention, and treatment of the illness.

This is not to say that Motion 508 may not be a helpful tool in winning the fight against Lyme disease. Rather, just by bringing this debate to the floor, we are helping to raise awareness of this disease, and for me this seems like the most significant component in improving our management of Lyme disease. We can always improve how we deliver information, and I am glad that Motion 508 gives us the opportunity to consider how we might change the current process to accomplish this.

Again I thank the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for his dedication, his compassion on behalf of all Albertans on the issue of Lyme disease.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak on Motion 508? Seeing none, I would ask the hon. member to close.

Mr. Rowe: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and a special thank you to all of the hon. members who rose to speak to this bill. The support is gratifying. As we have seen throughout debate, extensive research and analysis continue to indicate that the western blot test would work to further protect the safety of all Albertans in addition to the already in place ELISA test. We have the opportunity today to pass a motion with a great deal of positive outcomes. In the wake of an ever-increasing frequency of infections a strategy is needed to ensure that Albertans are able to get the testing and the treatment they need in order to live the lives that we as Albertans are so fortunate to have.

There is no greater lottery to win than being born here in Alberta, and we need to ensure for our children and grandchildren that it continues to be that way in the face of this debilitating disease. Updating our current testing standards and options will ensure that Albertans across this province are able to extensively be treated and tested for Lyme disease, thus lessening the possibilities for the disease to become a long-lasting chronic disease. Albertans' health is a priority, and this motion only works to promote this idea and policy. The health and livelihood of Albertans have been compromised, with more potentially at stake. We have an opportunity here to prevent that from happening again.

I want to thank every member who participated in this debate, and I urge all hon. members to vote in support of Motion 508.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried unanimously]

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

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It would be my motion at this point that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:41 p.m.]

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